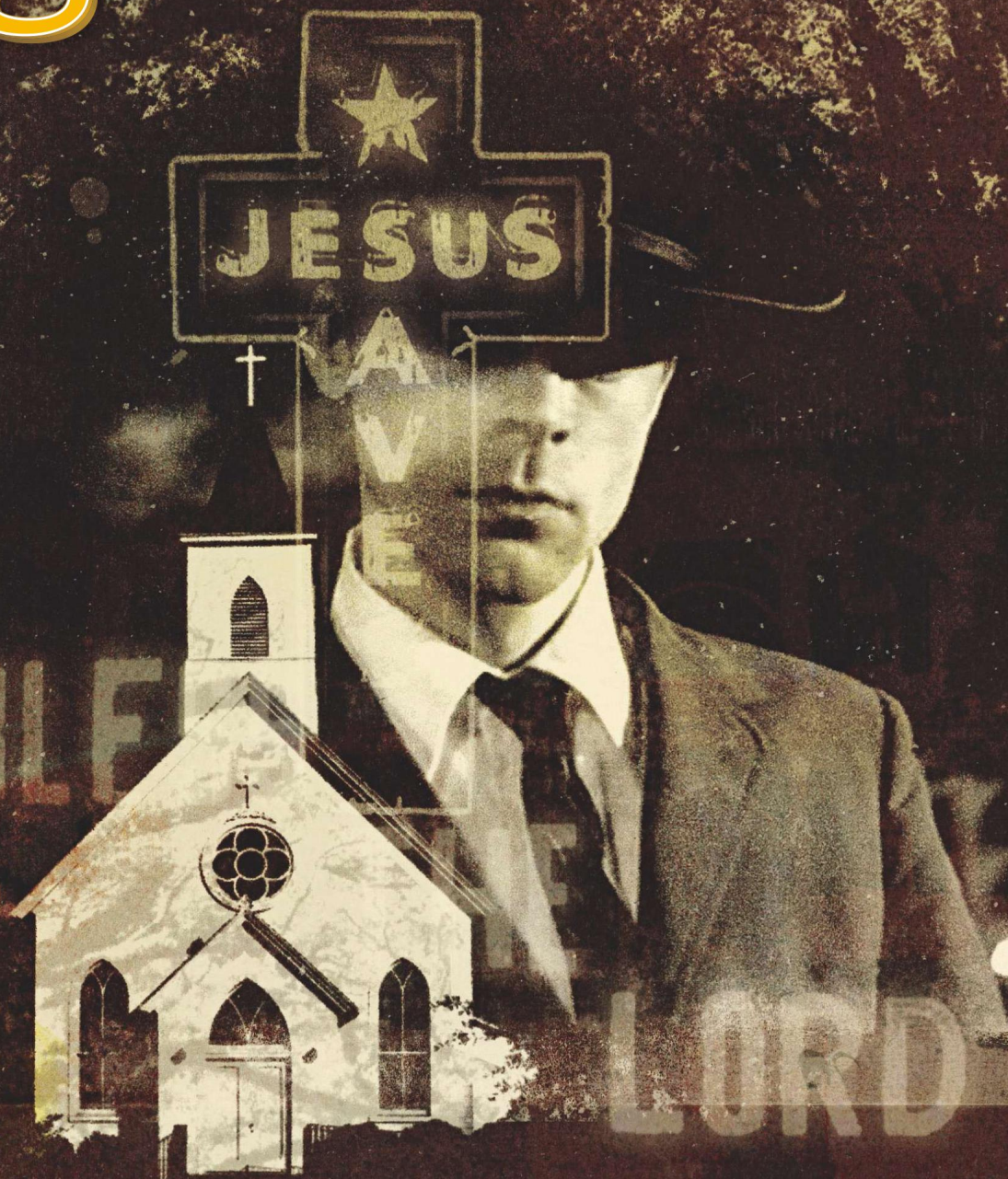


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Sight & Sound



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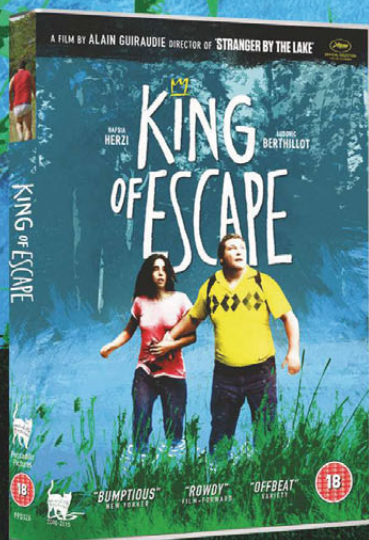
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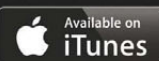
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on sale 5 May

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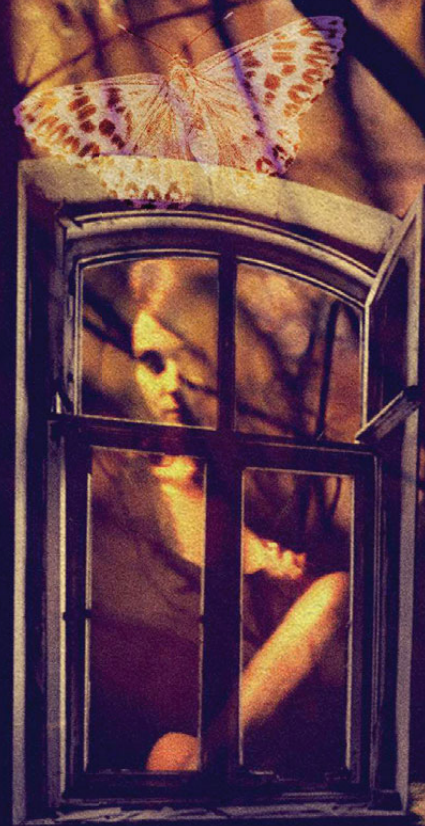
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"SUMPTUOUS, SURREAL, SERENADING, AND AUDACIOUSLY SUPERB"

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Editorial Nick James



UNCHARTED WATERS

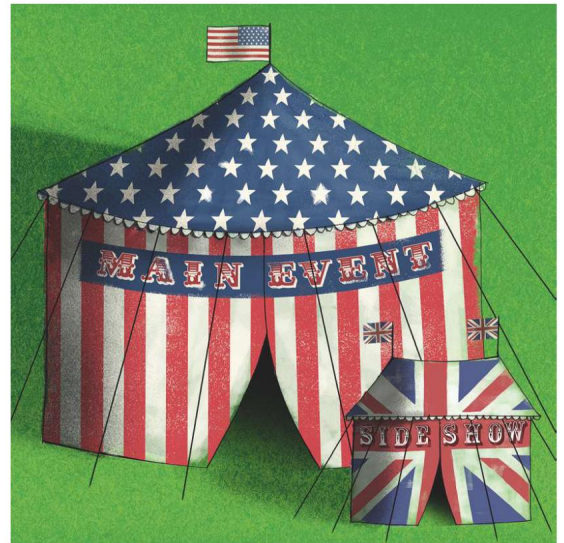
I've just been on one of those rare trips – to Bermuda in this case – where I get to hang out with helpful people who are in the swim of the American film industry. They tend to behave, rightly, as if they are at the centre of the film universe and will always remind you that, despite the wide range of interesting films and talent that have recently been coming out of the UK (for which you could equally substitute South Korea or Mexico), to them this output remains what it's always been: a sideshow. But these conversations are always going to help you better understand how things work for everyone in the film business, no matter where you are, in a top-down fashion.

It's gratifying, then, to find that many of the potentially half-assed ideas you've been nurturing about convergence and other changes in the industry happen sometimes to be as true in Hollywood or New York as they seem to be in Shoreditch or Pinewood. So, for instance, if you are someone who is trying to 'break in' as a screenwriter, as so many are, then the fairly recent notion that television drama is a much better place to start and to innovate than film really does seem to be true (as long as you realise that there are no truths in filmmaking that are not simultaneously solid and mutable). Apparently there's an actual shortage of writers for all the new successful US TV shows. Who knew?

I'm reliably informed, also, that if you become well known in Hollywood for one activity but want to switch to another discipline, you're almost as on your own as you might be anywhere else – unless, that is, you're a major movie star to whom a studio owes a big favour and you want to get into directing. So there really is no better way to make it as a director than the obvious one of creating a calling card by making a film that's a stunning and original piece of storytelling of a kind people really want to see. And it's still as true about films now as ever that nobody knows anything, except that the money people really can tell you in advance what your project will make at the box office – except when they're wrong. Happily, if rarely, they are sometimes wrong. Confusing? Of course it is.

I'm musing through these crumbs of campfire wisdom because I'm about to chair a panel discussion entitled 'Innovation in recent British cinema' at the BFI Southbank in London. By the time you read this it will already have happened but what will be of

Americans will always remind you that, despite the range of interesting films that have been coming out of the UK, to them this output remains what it's always been: a sideshow



major concern there is the continued health of British film. We can and will celebrate the rich diversity of works, from, say, *Under the Skin* to *'71* to *The Theory of Everything* and will touch on such vivid recent and upcoming releases as *The Duke of Burgundy*, *The Falling* and *Catch Me Daddy*. However, there are some shadows falling over this garden of delights.

The most significant of these is European Union legislation, proposed by one Günther Oettinger, to create a single digital market for all members of the EU, potentially uniting digital access rights to 28 markets into one single package. This threatens the whole ecology of how many European and UK films are usually financed – by pre-selling rights territory by territory. If there's only one right to buy, then the cross-media digital giants – Google, Netflix *et al* – will be the buyers, and they will be paying bottom dollar.

The Americans I've been listening to all confirm that the middle-budget territory, which used to be occupied by more adult US cinema, has been totally abandoned by Hollywood. It is in that vacuum that US indies such as *Still Alice*, as well the UK's successes like *Mr. Turner*, have been operating. If British films can't be pre-sold piecemeal across European territories, their budgets will shrink once again. It's possible to argue, given how cheap the technology of digital filmmaking has become, that an official industry, when you get down further to these very low budget levels, becomes a moot point, and that some kind of YouTube aesthetic can take over. But, as at least one American has told me in the past week, we've all danced on the grave of good cinema several times since the mid-90s, and no matter what the forces arrayed against it are, it always somehow bounces back. So if the middle-budget film is declared dead, then long live the middle-budget film. **S**

IN THE FRAME

POLE TO POLE



Distant drums: Aleksander Ford managed to secure a generous budget for his lavish historical epic *Knights of the Black Cross* (1960)

A touring selection of films from the golden age of Polish cinema reveals an industry in rude health in spite of the censor's scissors

By David Thompson

In 2014, a collection of fully restored Polish films under the banner of 'Martin Scorsese Presents' went on tour in the US, and now a modified version of that selection plays in the UK. Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* (1958), Wojciech Has's *The Saragossa Manuscript* (1965) and Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of the Angels* (1961), to name but three, are probably familiar to many and their status undisputed, but who decides

the true canon of 'Polish classics'? Should it only include films made in the communist era?

Fiction films were created in Poland as far back as 1902, but hardly anything prior to World War II is visible today. There was once a thriving sub-industry of movies made in Yiddish (check out the 1937 version of *The Dybbuk* if you can). But in 1945, with a communist regime firmly in place, filmmaking went back to year zero, and that's when this collection begins. Production was nationalised and all films monitored to eradicate any hint of criticism about the direction of social change, though a degree of freedom came after 1956. Budgets could be generous, hence the scale of Aleksander Ford's popular epic *Knights of the Black Cross* (1960) and Kawalerowicz's intelligent take on ancient Egypt, *Pharaoh* (1965).

The earliest film on show is Andrzej Munk's *Eroica* (1958), a powerfully sardonic view of Poles dealing with the German occupation. It's made with huge confidence and a dynamic use of the frame, underlining the irrefutable contribution of the Polish National Film School in Lodz, where future directors received a thorough training in their craft. Students there had access to world cinema to a degree unimagined by the average Polish citizen. Tadeusz Konwicki appeared to be under the influence of Antonioni's ambiguous, poetic style in making *The Last Day of Summer* (1958), in which a woman and a younger man act out a hopeless relationship on a beach. In Konwicki's later film, *Jump* (1965), a stranger stumbles into a village populated by enigmatic figures with whom he may or may not share

ON OUR
RADAR

LA Rebellion

Julie Dash's 1991 'Daughters of the Dust' (which Ava DuVernay has cited as a key influence on 'Selma') is one of a number of ground-breaking films from African-American directors who emerged from UCLA in the 1970s, which have been gathered together for this season at London's Tate Modern (10-25 April). Among them are Charles Burnett's 'Killer of Sheep' (1977), Haile Gerima's 'Bush Mama' (1975) and Larry Clark's 1977 jazz portrait 'Passing Through' (right).



8½

Surely the urtext of films about filmmaking and creative crises, Fellini's '8½' (right), is restored and back on big screens across the UK from 1 May. Unsurprisingly it's a perennial filmmakers' favourite – "a lustful, sweaty, gluttonous poem to cinema," according to Guillermo del Toro – and a regular feature in directors' top tens in S&S's Greatest Films of All Time poll.






The 'Polish James Dean': Zbigniew Cybulski, in leather jacket, in Tadeusz Konwicki's *Jump* (1965)

a common past. Today such films can seem pretentious – *Jump* looks rather like an episode of *The Prisoner* directed by Ingmar Bergman – but that was one response to evading the censor.

The lead in *Jump* is played by arguably the best known of Polish actors, Zbigniew Cybulski, and in it he sports the trademark leather jacket and dark glasses from his key role in *Ashes and Diamonds* (Scorsese picked up on the shades for 1973's *Mean Streets*, and also put the film in his top ten in *Sight & Sound*'s 2012 Greatest Films of All Time poll). The charismatic Cybulski, who died in an accident in 1967 at the age of 39, became as potent an icon of male youth for Poles as Dean and Brando did in the West.

The dominant figure of this generation behind the camera, Wajda has proved to be the most politically astute of all Polish directors, riding a brief wave of artistic liberation with *The Promised Land* (1974) and then documenting the rise of the Solidarity trade union movement with *Man of Iron* (1981). But those hopes were soured by the imposition of martial law. While Kawalerowicz was able to make *Austeria* (1982), a long-nurtured project about the lost world of the Jews in Galicia, because the new government was at pains to repudiate anti-Semitism, Krzysztof Kielowski's 1981 *Blind Chance* was banned, and only released in 1987. Exploring three possible parallel narratives in the life of a student, based on

whether he misses or catches a train, it revealed Kieslowski as a major director, an assessment that was reinforced by the international acclaim for *A Short Film About Killing* (1987).

Kieslowski is arguably the greatest exponent of what came to be labelled the 'Cinema of Moral Anxiety', which some would say was kick-started by Janusz Morgenstern's acerbic *To Kill This Love* (1972). Also included in this movement is Krzysztof Zanussi, who is represented by three films in the season. Often prioritising dialogue over visuals, his detached, thesis-like approach to cinema has not aged well. Although more maverick talents like Roman Polanski, Jerzy Skolimowski and Agnieszka Holland, all of whom would leave Poland for wider opportunities, are represented by a film each in the season, it's regrettable that two other great Polish visionaries who went to work abroad are not – Walerian Borowczyk and Andrzej Zulawski. At least Borowczyk's *The Story of Sin* (1975) is now undergoing restoration, but there are clearly many titles still out there deserving of a digital renaissance. 

'Martin Scorsese Presents: Masterpieces of Polish cinema' launches at the 13th Kinoteka Polish Film Festival on 8 April, with films screening at BFI Southbank, London, Filmhouse Edinburgh and selected cinemas across the UK and Ireland

LISTOMANIA GIRLS' SCHOOLS

With *The Falling* (see page 28), Carol Morley stands in a long tradition of directors drawn to the cloistered world of female education.

- 1 **The Belles of St. Trinian's** (1954, below)
Frank Launder
- 2 **Mädchen in Uniform** (1958)
Géza von Radványi
- 3 **The Children's Hour** (1961)
William Wyler
- 4 **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie** (1961)
Ronald Neame
- 5 **La residencia** (1969)
Narciso Ibañez Serrador
- 6 **Lust For a Vampire** (1971)
Jimmy Sangster
- 7 **Picnic at Hanging Rock** (1975)
Peter Weir
- 8 **Suspiria** (1977)
Dario Argento
- 9 **Whispering Corridors** (1998)
Park Ki-hyeong
- 10 **Innocence** (2004)
Lucile Hadzihalilovic



QUOTE OF THE MONTH ALBERT MAYSLES

'There's so much that has to be known but isn't because it wasn't filmed properly and made into a good film'

For an obituary of Albert Maysles, who died on 5 March, visit bfi.org.uk/sightandsound



PHOTOEST NAC (3)

Cannes Film Festival

As news that the 'Mad Max' reboot with Tom Hardy will be storming the Croisette (out of competition, naturally), what other highlights will be revealed this edition (13-24 May)? Among the rumoured titles are Hou Hsiao-hsien's 'The Assassin' (right), Apichatpong Weerasethakul's 'Love in Khon Kaen', Miguel Gomes's 'Arabian Nights', Todd Haynes's 'Carol', Ben Wheatley's 'High-Rise' and Terence Davies's 'Sunset Song'. The full programme is announced on 16 April.



HOME

Opening on 21 May is HOME (right), Manchester's new centre for contemporary art, theatre and film, the result of a merger of two cultural institutions, Cornerhouse and the Library Theatre Company. The new building, designed by Dutch architects Mecanoo, will host five cinema screens and digital production and broadcast facilities. Its opening weekend will feature a screening of John Maclean's Sundance prize-winner 'Slow West'.



IT'S CURTAINS!

Drapes can evoke surprise and delight but also hint at the threat that lies beyond their concealed interior



By Hannah McGill

There's always a hint of self-referentiality when a film features shots of curtained windows: the cinema screen, providing

as it does a squared-off glimpse into another realm, resembles a window, and although most cinemas have ceased to deploy real curtains, the archetype of a red-draped proscenium arch endures in the collective imagination. David Lynch has helped to lodge it there, with the red velvet curtains that provide boundaries between worlds in much of his work; Baz Luhrmann emphasised the theatricality of his early work by grouping *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) as the 'Red Curtain Trilogy'. For Lynch, according to a 2014 *Time Out* interview, "There is something so incredibly cosmically magical about curtains opening and revealing a new world. It resonates on a deep level with people."

Curtains, via their association with theatrical spectacle, evoke the promise of surprise and delight; yet there is also threat in their capacity to conceal, and in the boundary they represent between domestic safety and the outside. In *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), that most shockingly self-deconstructing of fantasies, a mere curtain shields the operator of the Oz myth from discovery, and his bedazzled public from the fact of his ordinariness. Sumptuous drapery is part of the conspicuous consumption enjoyed by the Corleone clan in *The Godfather* trilogy, but its permeability also emphasises the constant peril in which they live: "Michael, why are the drapes open?" asks Kay Corleone (Diane Keaton) in Part II, just before an onslaught of bullets wrecks the room.

In *Rebecca* (1940), *Manderley*, another lavishly appointed nest of secrets, is thickly hung with curtains. Their long vertical folds are echoed in the ill-connoted shepherdess costume the protagonist is tricked into wearing, and in the canopied bed once occupied by her storied predecessor. The effect implies prison bars – and whom they appear to entrap alters as narrative detail is revealed. Initially it's the second Mrs De Winter (Joan Fontaine) who seems caught, by her own self-consciousness and within the gilded cage of *Manderley*; but when her husband Maxim (Laurence Olivier) reveals the true nature of his relationship with Rebecca and his role in her disappearance, it is he who is positioned in front of curtains. Rebecca's room, in which her obsessively faithful housekeeper Mrs Danvers (Judith Anderson) subjects the new Mrs De Winter to a torturous guided tour of Rebecca's frocks and underwear, is hung with and divided by fluttery, sheer drapes. All the better to loom behind, for the ghoulish Mrs Danvers – but the see-through fabric also hints



Net contribution: the gauzy curtains of the first Mrs De Winter's boudoir in *Rebecca* (1940)



Toto the hero: drawing back the drapes in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)

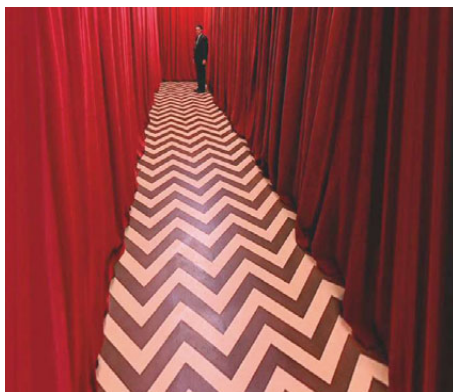
The green curtain dress in 'Gone with the Wind' both reveals and conceals: it promotes Scarlett as an erotic object, while masking her poverty and desperation



Sketch for Scarlett's dress in *Gone with the Wind*

at Rebecca's sexual licentiousness, echoing as it does the *risqué* nightgown that Mrs Danvers so delights in showing off ("Look! You can see my hand through it!"). The impression is of a room utterly and horribly permeated with another woman's sexual being; one might even consider the curtains labial imagery, indicative of Rebecca's engulfing erotic appetites, and the terror they hold for the virginal protagonist. Being in Rebecca's room is like being inside her corrupt and gorgeous body; when Mrs Danvers offers our heroine an escape, it's by parting the curtains and proposing suicide ("You're overwrought, Madam; I've opened a window for you... You've nothing to live for, really, have you? Look down there – it's easy, isn't it? Why don't you?").

Not as exposing as Rebecca's nightgown, but no less tooled for maximum impact, is the curtain dress from *Gone with the Wind* (1939). When an impoverished Scarlett (Vivien Leigh) commands Mammy (Hattie McDaniel) to make an outfit out of her late mother's beloved green "portières", in which she intends to dazzle and extort cash from Rhett Butler, the scene has a few interesting folds of its own. That Mammy can, seemingly without great expense of effort, create an outfit that easily passes for high fashion emphasises, albeit in a film that wholly romanticises the ownership of people, the uncredited creativity and skill of America's black slave community. The sequence also highlights the sudden social shift to which Scarlett and her kind must adapt: the falling away of their parents' unthinking old-world luxury ("They're my *portières* now," insists Scarlett over Mammy's objections) and its replacement by hardscrabble entrepreneurship – which in Scarlett's case means making herself tempting to men who can help her to boost her wealth. (That Mammy and Scarlett both misuse the word 'portière', which by rights refers to a curtain over a door, could be read as a comment on their lack of breeding, but is more likely a mistake of the script; Margaret Mitchell's source novel deploys the term correctly.) The green curtain dress, like Lynch and Luhrmann's red curtains or Rebecca's suggestive drapes, both reveals and conceals: it promotes Scarlett as an erotic object, while masking her poverty and desperation; it lies about the durability of the luxe antebellum plantation lifestyle and also, through its very phoniness and the vandalism in its origins, embodies that civilisation's demise. For curtains, of course, also stand for death. ☹



Lynchian curtains in *Twin Peaks* (1991)

THE FIVE KEY...

THOMAS HARDY FILMS

In Wessex or out of it, the clashing moral imperatives and looming catastrophes of Hardy's novels create strong plotlines

By Philip Kemp

For a writer with such an acute sense of place, Hardy gets relocated quite a bit. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* goes to India with Michael Winterbottom's *Trishna* (2011), with Wahid-ud-deen Ahmed's *Man Ki Jeet* (1944) and D.D. Kashyap's *Dulhan Ek Raat Ki* (1966); and to Korea with Kim Soo-yong's *Mi-ae* (1970). *The Mayor of Casterbridge* moves to Gold Rush-era California in *The Claim* (2000, Winterbottom again). But wherever they're set, Hardy's conflicted characters, at odds with their society and their fates, make for potent drama – as Thomas Vinterberg's new version of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (released in UK cinemas on 1 May and reviewed on page 60) will, with luck, confirm.



2 The Mayor of Casterbridge (1978)

A seven-part BBC series scripted by Dennis Potter, with Alan Bates giving a magisterial performance in the title role of Michael Henchard, whose drunken misdeed 20 years ago, before he made his fortune, comes back to haunt him. Like Schlesinger's film, this was shot in Wessex locations, but to altogether darker, more doom-laden effect, with wind and storm clouds presaging Henchard's downfall.



4 Jude (1996)

The first of Michael Winterbottom's three Hardy adaptations so far, and the only one set in Wessex (though it was shot much further north). From Hardy's last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, it's anchored by Christopher Eccleston's grim, saturnine Jude, a working man whose taste for learning puts him outside his class; Kate Winslet is the flighty cousin he loves. It catches the novel's angry, fatalistic mood superbly.



1 Far from the Madding Crowd (1967)

After several English-language adaptations of Hardy novels in the silent era he fell out of fashion; John Schlesinger's sweeping, romantic treatment (released in a new restoration on DVD in June) was the first for nearly 40 years. Nearly three hours long and over-faithful to its source, it's redeemed by Dorset settings – caressed by Nicolas Roeg's glorious widescreen photography – and its Oscar-nominated score.



3 Tess (1979)

Wary of crossing the Channel, given the possibility of extradition to the US, Roman Polanski shot his version of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in Normandy and Brittany. It's visually lovely, even if the polystyrene Stonehenge recalls *This Is Spinal Tap* and 18-year-old Nastassja Kinski makes an improbable peasant girl. *Tess* picked up three Oscars, but from the maker of *Chinatown* and *Rosemary's Baby* it feels a touch bland.



5 The Woodlanders (1997)

A lesser-known novel and a lesser-known film, directed by the documentarist Phil Agland from a script by David Rudkin. Shot over the course of a year to lend authenticity to the rural seasons, it's a tale of love thwarted by social snobbery: a young woman pressured by her aspirant father to marry a rich but unsuitable man rather than a poor but faithful woodsman. Slow-paced, but long on atmosphere.



*"A GENIUS PERFORMANCE BY MORTENSEN...
STAGGERING ARTISTRY"*

Little White Lies

— A Film By —
LISANDRO ALONSO

JAUJA

(How-Ha)

THE LAND *of* PLENTY



Empire

VIGGO MORTENSEN



IN CINEMAS AND
ON **CURZON** APRIL 10
HOME CINEMA



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SUMMER IN A SMALL TOWN

The ghosts of Rohmer and Naruse haunt *Au revoir l'été*, Fukuda Koji's tale of a young girl coming of age in a seaside town

By Trevor Johnston

The export release title might conjure up a Rohmeresque world of holiday-time ennui, but the light, bright, summery images in Fukuda Koji's third feature, *Au revoir l'été*, merely serve to lure the viewer into a film with much to say about the ills of Japanese society. Here the small seaside town, where Nikaido Fumi's teenager Sakuko finds herself staying with her spinster aunt, gradually reveals a window on the country's hidden class tensions, hypocritical attitudes to sexual equality, and the failings of democracy after the Fukushima nuclear disaster. The approach is discursive rather than hectoring, though it's still relatively rare for a contemporary Japanese film to manifest a genuine sense of social engagement while still delivering an attractive and engaging drama.

Fukuda's previous work, including 2010's social comedy *Hospitalité*, has been acclaimed on the festival circuit, but this will be the first chance for UK cinemagoers to experience the work of a Japanese writer-director-editor whose work runs stealthily against the grain – not least for the fact that he honed his craft in the theatre with Hirata Oriza's famed Seinendan company, responsible for a new strain of naturalism on the Japanese stage.

Trevor Johnston: The original Japanese title, *Hotori no Sakuko*, roughly translates as 'Sakuko on the margin', yet presumably creating her character was the key to the story?

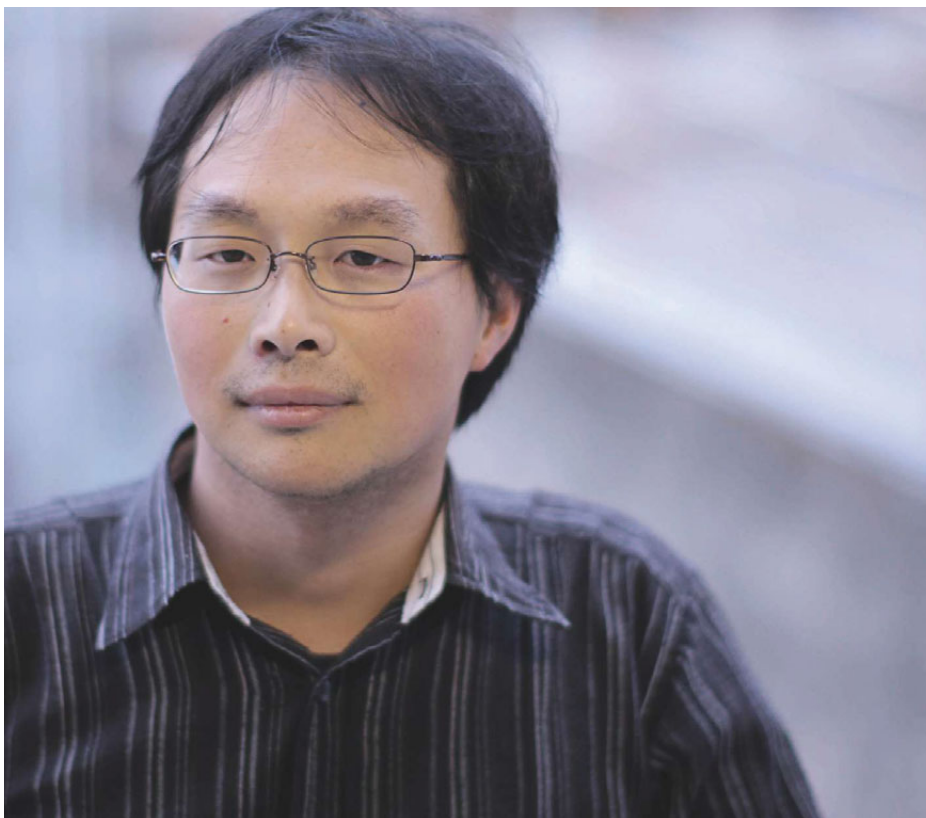
Fukuda Koji: Yes, I was actually inspired by meeting the actress Nikaido Fumi, who manages to combine a real youthfulness with a professional maturity, having been in the business for a number of years. So Sakuko is someone between childhood and the adult world. She's failed her university entrance exam so has to take a year out, so it's an ambivalent, unbalanced time in her life, which makes her the person to take the audience on the journey into the labyrinth.

TJ: And what are the component parts of this labyrinth?

FK: Well, for instance, there's a sort of fake hotel. It looks normal, but it's actually operating as a love hotel, where we see the local politician and a suggestion of teenage prostitution. It's illegal, but it goes on, and for me that's a way of exploring women's sexual roles. Contrast that with Mikie, Sakuko's aunt, someone who's made a very strong decision not to have children, which really runs against the common perception in Japan that women are there to have babies.

TJ: Sakuko also strikes up a friendship with a refugee from Fukushima, which presumably was a way of approaching this thorny subject?

FK: Absolutely. It would not have been possible for me to make a film without tackling the nuclear power issue in some way, but I didn't want to do it directly, because in Japan we've become pretty much inured to images of the suffering in Tohoku [the region surrounding



Fukuda Koji: 'I want to create a sort of unresolved space so the audience has to fill in the gaps'

Fukushima]. What you have to realise is that the nuclear power issue is actually fundamental to the question of democracy in Japan. The explosion and the aftermath are one thing, but then we elected politicians who are continuing the policy of nuclear power. There are anti-nuclear demonstrations almost every day, yet that doesn't in any way affect the power base of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

TJ: You can sense a sort of simmering discontent as the story progresses, but the film never becomes overtly angry.

FK: For me the cinema is really bound up with the history of propaganda – not so much in subject

Naruse and Rohmer create a very simple, almost a pure environment for the story. I've tried to capture something of that



Inbetweeners: Nikaido Fumi as Sakuko

matter, but in the process, the notion of just how easy it is for us to be made to change our minds, to be manipulated. So when it comes to my own films, I'm really very wary of creating emotional propaganda. Instead I want to create a sort of unresolved space, something that's discursive, so the audience has to fill in the gaps for themselves.

TJ: There's a certain hint of Rohmer in the subject matter, but do I also detect a Naruse influence in the combination of everyday drama and underlying social comment?

FK: You spotted it. When I was growing up, I really watched a lot of pre-1960 films, and Naruse was the one who made the strongest impression. I see a strong kinship between Naruse and Rohmer because there's always a clear relationship between the characters and the camera. They create a very simple, almost a pure environment for the story. And I've tried to capture something of that by always shooting the action from the front, by keeping a certain distance, and never distorting the relationship between the characters and the viewer by using low camera angles.

TJ: Yes, it's certainly unfashionably classical in that regard, so does that explain your choice of Academy ratio?

FK: What I'm trying to do with film is shoot human beings and show their relationships. 4:3 is definitely the most suitable ratio for the human face, though something that I learned from my work in the theatre was that when we really look at people we realise they never really say what they're actually thinking. I don't know if that's typically Japanese, but it's something Sakuko discovers for herself in the course of the story. ☺

i *Au revoir l'été* is released in UK cinemas on 24 April and is reviewed on page 69

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APRIL 13

HAN GONG-JU

"Han Gong-ju" is outstanding in Mise-en scene, image, sound, editing and performance. I have a lot to learn from this movie and I can't wait to see Lee Su-jin's next film".

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STOPPING THE ROT

A recent week-long film preservation school in Mumbai suggests the tide is turning in the battle to protect India's film classics



By Mark Cousins

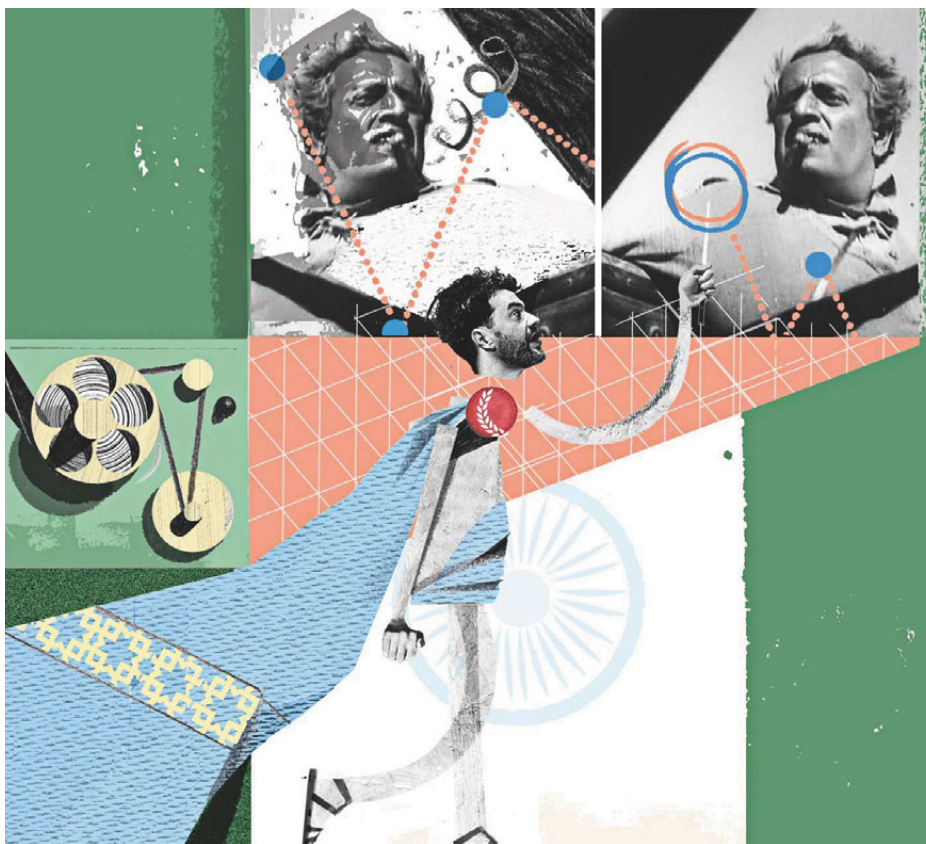
Islamic State's bulldozing of Nimrud in Iraq made headlines around the world. The Reformation turned European churches into rubble.

Alexander sacked Persepolis. Europe's 20th-century wars destroyed thousands of works of art.

Great things are always disappearing, through rage or neglect. The present order is the disorder of the future. But wilful iconoclasm and indifference are differences of degree, not kind. The result is the same: fading, blurring, erosion, burial.

The films of India are the movie world's greatest loss. The country has made more films than any other – it has so many regional and linguistic film cultures that it is better to think of it as a cinema continent – yet its movies are woefully underseen by Western movie buffs, who think it's either Bollywood or Satyajit Ray. This is in part because of our post-colonial inattention or, worse, our racism by omission, but it's also because many of the great films have fallen into disrepair in a culture that has traditionally treated film as a business rather than an artform. Producers' and copyright holders' neglect, climatic conditions, nitrate film fires and the sale of black-and-white film for its silver content and colour film for its use in dyes, have all taken their toll. As a result, when the world's leading film festivals have tried to do full retrospectives of, for example, Mrinal Sen – the political, modernist filmmaker who has won scores of awards – they have largely been unable to do so, as the films were in no fit shape. I wanted to put more Guru Dutt films (my favourite Indian director, who I've sometimes compared to Orson Welles) in *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*, but the materials were not there. Many of Bengali director Tapan Sinha's masterpieces, such as *Nirjan Saikate*, are not available in good prints. The original camera negatives of the films of key figures such as P.C. Barua, Debaki Bose, Sohrab Modi, Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor, V. Shantaram and Ritwik Ghatak are our era's Nimrud, our Persepolis. They are as important to Indian cinema as, say, Frank Capra, William Wyler or Fred Zinnemann are to American film. The decay, or loss, of their negatives should outrage *Sight & Sound* readers.

Which is why what happened in Mumbai in late February matters so much. Filmmaker and historian Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, who recently founded Film Heritage Foundation, invite the world's expert archivists for a week-long school on film preservation and restoration. Some 126 students applied – from India, Sri Lanka and Nepal – and 52 were selected. The key preservation people from the Cineteca di Bologna, the Film Foundation, Paramount Pictures, L'Immagine Ritrovata (the great laboratory in Bologna that specialises in film preservation), the World Cinema Project, London's Imperial War Museum, the BFI, the Criterion Collection and



If restoration and preservation skills can be taught and spread in India, then a massive problem can be met by a massive solution

the International Federation of Film Archives presented a series of lectures. Subjects included preservation workflow (identification, repair, scanning, restoration, colour correction, sound restoration and film mastering), film technology, digital and the ethics of digitisation, and the challenges of preserving in India (heat, etc). And there were case studies of the restorations of *A Fistful of Dollars*, the Chaplin shorts, *The Colour of Pomegranates*, the Hitchcock films, *Pathar Panchali*, Ghatak's Bengali film *A River Called Titas*, *Badlands*, *The Leopard* and *Hiroshima mon amour*. The events took place at the Films Division of



Amitabh Bachchan (right) with P.K. Nair

India, India's government film body, established in 1948, and at the Art Deco Liberty cinema, billed at its inception as "the showcase of the nation".

Dungarpur, through the foundation, is working towards stemming the loss of some of the world's film heritage, and teaching skills that could then be replicated, to prevent further losses. India has a huge workforce, of course, many of whom are highly computer savvy – Bangalore, for example, is sometimes called the country's Silicon Valley. If film restoration and preservation skills can be taught and spread, then a massive problem can be met by a massive solution.

I wasn't at the Mumbai event, but it seems to have been a landmark. The Criterion Collection's Lee Kline wrote that it is changing film history. The Cineteca di Bologna's Gian Luca Farinelli (whom I always think of as the pope of film restoration) called it extraordinary.

And then there's the photograph on this page. Arguably the world's most famous man, the Hindi megastar of nearly 200 films, Amitabh Bachchan, is presenting a lifetime achievement award to one of the great men in film history, P.K. Nair, the founder of the National Film Archive of India. The story of how, for decades, Nair heroically collected Indian film prints and negatives is told in Dungarpur's documentary *Celluloid Man*, an epic threnody of cinephilia and loss. For those who care, this is a very moving image. It's like seeing Humphrey Bogart giving a prize to keeper of the flame of the Cinémathèque Française, Henri Langlois. Stardom on the right, scholarship on the left. The visual, emotional embodiment of Indian film's success on the right, its *memento mori* on the left. It's like Bachchan is saying, "Thank you for keeping me alive."

DEVELOPMENT TALE

A ROYAL NIGHT OUT



Mirror, mirror: Sarah Gadon, wearing pearls, as young Princess Elizabeth in *A Royal Night Out*

There's no royal road to the screen: for Julian Jarrold's film, it took nine years, an Oscar for Colin Firth and a title change

By Charles Gant

The idea began at a development brainstorm at film production company Ecosse in April 2006. Team member James Saynor pitched a film jumping off the fact that on VE Day in May 1945 the two royal princesses were allowed out of the palace to enjoy the celebrations, visiting a party at the Ritz and mingling with the crowd in The Mall. Taking inspiration from *Roman Holiday*, the story would be a fictional reverse-*Cinderella* "what if?" scenario, a night of adventure and discovery featuring real-life characters of global renown.

Getting the idea beyond the page proved not so easy. Ecosse and development partner HanWay first commissioned Trevor De Silva (a successful advertising creative), who delivered four drafts of the screenplay—originally called *Girls' Night Out*—between July 2007 and July 2008. Director Michael Hoffman (*Restoration*) boarded, but it wasn't until February 2011 that HanWay was able to make the announcement in the trade press, with Dakota Fanning attached as the young

Princess Margaret. The same year, the story of the princesses' night out appeared in *The Final Curtesy*, a memoir by the Queen's cousin and close childhood friend Margaret Rhodes. (It also inspired film critic Peter Bradshaw's fictional retelling, *Night of Triumph*, published in 2013.)

In September 2010, *The King's Speech* appeared, winning the audience award at the Toronto Film Festival and going on to a major Bafta and Oscar sweep, plus \$414 million in global box office. "It definitely helped it," says Robert Bernstein, co-founder of Ecosse and producer for *Girls' Night Out*. "We'd had it in development so long, and we were trudging around. I would say, before *The King's Speech* there wasn't that much interest in the project, and afterwards we had definite interest."

But the film did not proceed. In February 2012 it was announced again, with Hoffman still directing, but Alexandra Roach and Juno Temple now playing the princesses. While Hoffman went off to make the crime caper *Gambit* in 2012, Ecosse brought in Kevin Hood (*Becoming Jane*) to rework the script. After completing *Gambit*, Hoffman opted to pursue another film rather than recommitting to *Girls' Night Out*, "at which point," Bernstein says, "it was clear that we needed to part company".

Bernstein had shown an earlier version of

the script to Julian Jarrold, who had directed *Becoming Jane* for Ecosse. Now he read the new Kevin Hood version, and was eager to jump in. His main suggestion: make it funnier.

"Without losing the drama of it, he felt that a more comedic and witty approach was what he was interested in," says Bernstein.

The new script brought a fresh approach to casting, an area in which Jarrold and Ecosse were given generous latitude by the financiers, notably Lionsgate, which had UK rights. "Lionsgate's view was that this is a film for an older audience," says Bernstein. "If you can get a couple of names in there that reflect that older audience's interest, we'll be happier. That's why Rupert [Everett] and Emily [Watson] were really important [as King George VI and wife Elizabeth]. They said, as for the young ones, at the end of the day, choose who you think are good for the roles. Because there aren't that many actresses of that age group who mean anything, especially to an older audience. It was fantastic for us to cast people we just felt were great for the roles, and could be discovered."

Based on auditions, Ecosse and Jarrold were taken with a young Canadian actress called Sarah Gadon (*Belle*) to play Princess Elizabeth; for the teenage Princess Margaret (aka 'P2') they picked Bel Powley, known in casting circles for an acclaimed performance in the

Royal Court play *Tusk Tusk*. Irish actor Jack Reynor (*What Richard Did*) signed on as Jack, the young soldier who befriends and looks after Elizabeth over the course of one wildly eventful night, not realising her status.

As the shooting dates drifted into spring 2014, Ecosse faced a fresh worry. As Bernstein explains, “Four fifths of it is set outside at night. The later we were going to go, the worse the scenario would be, because of not having enough night time as the sun rose earlier and earlier.” With funding from Screen Yorkshire, Hull provided a surprisingly convincing period Soho. No single English country house could deliver Jarrold what he needed for Buckingham Palace interiors, which meant shooting in both Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire. A night apiece followed at two key real locations, Trafalgar Square and The Mall.

In January this year, Lionsgate showed *Girls’ Night Out* to cinema bookers and press to get early reactions. “All the exhibitors saw it, and they were all extremely positive about the film,” says Bernstein. “Quite a few independently said, ‘We feel there needs to be a slight change to the title, because the present title just doesn’t give the audience we want to attract a correct sense of what the film is about.’” A new title was agreed between the filmmaking team and Lionsgate.

“The original title was obviously intended to be ironic,” says Bernstein. “Hopefully for the sizeable audience we want to attract, I can see the point that if you call it *A Royal Night*

You’ve got to believe something’s looking after you, because this film was on life support so many times over the years

Out, there’s going to be so many more people who will automatically identify with the brand of royalty. I can see the argument.”

Arriving in cinemas nine years after initial conception, *A Royal Night Out* has given Ecosse a fair few stressful moments, but looks likely to deliver a welcome hit after a mixed run of films, including *Black Death*, Andrea Arnold’s *Wuthering Heights*, the Princess Diana tale *Diana* and the little-seen *Pelican Blood*, *The Decoy Bride* and teen horror *Love Bite*. It can’t fail to receive a boost from the 70th anniversary of VE Day, on May 8.

“People have mentioned it as if it was machine-engineer designed to hit a certain date,” says Bernstein. “I’d be completely remiss and incorrect to say that was the case, but I must say it’s a wonderful result. If there’s a message from a long-gestating project, where you think it’s never going to happen and you lose the will to live: if it’s meant to happen, it’s meant to happen, and if it’s good, it will have its rewards. It’s such an energetic process, originating, creating, financing, producing a film, only someone who’s mad would contemplate it. You’ve got to believe that there’s something out there that’s looking after you, because this was on life support so many times over the years. It was obviously meant to be.”



A Royal Night Out opens on 15 May and will be reviewed in next month’s issue

THE NUMBERS STILL ALICE

By Charles Gant

As soon as *Still Alice* premiered at the Toronto Film Festival last September it was evident that Julianne Moore was going to figure in this year’s awards. With competition in the Best Actress category looking slimmer than usual – which is not to diminish her achievement in the film – Moore very quickly emerged as the favourite for the Oscar.

Curzon Artificial Eye, which acquired *Still Alice* for the UK, consequently faced a big dilemma. To do right by the film and Moore, it needed the picture to qualify for the Baftas, which traditionally means releasing in UK cinemas in advance of the ceremony. But January was chock-a-block with major awards contenders, and there just didn’t seem to be a release date that offered a safe refuge.

The distributor took a close look at the Bafta rules, and spotted a potential loophole. Curzon understood that *Still Alice* would be eligible for the awards as long as it played for seven days to a paying audience. The film quietly ran a week at the Curzon Ripon in North Yorkshire in mid-December, grossing a meagre £130. National critics failed to notice, or pretended it wasn’t happening, and no reviews ran. The actual release followed on 6 March, a month after the Baftas ceremony.

As Jon Rushton, Curzon’s head of theatrical, recounts, “We contacted Bafta and said, ‘According to the letter of your rules, if the film has played commercially for seven days, then it qualifies. It didn’t say that the reviews had to run. And it didn’t say that you couldn’t release much wider later.’ Bafta said, ‘That is correct.’”

Moore came in on the Wednesday before the Bafta ceremony, recorded *The Graham Norton Show*, completed a large number of press interviews, and attended a sold-out preview screening at the 700-seat Curzon Chelsea. By the time the film landed in cinemas in March, the crush of major awards contenders – *The Theory of Everything*, *Birdman*, *Whiplash*, *Selma*, *American Sniper*, *Foxcatcher*, *Wild* – was finally beginning to thin out. *Still Alice*



Julianne Moore and Kristen Stewart in *Still Alice*

debuted with a stunning £402,000 from 86 cinemas, expanding a week later into 201 venues and then into 234 in its third session. After 17 days, UK box office stood at £1.7 million.

“The release date massively benefited us,” says Rushton. “We were held back by the US, which released on January 16. So we would have had to release between mid-January and the Baftas, and every week there was tough competition. It’s not even so much what box office the other films were going to do, it’s about getting into the best screens, the best venues.”

Curzon knew that although *Still Alice* reviews were likely to be positive, the film’s early-onset Alzheimer’s subject matter might sound depressing to audiences – but big awards wins could add a feel-good halo. “It creates a whole feeling around the film that’s different,” says Rushton. “It’s become wrapped up in that awards glow and all the good will people feel towards Julianne Moore. I think that’s all reflected in the box-office result in a way it wouldn’t have been had we tried to release it before the Baftas.”

JULIANNE MOORE AT UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Children of Men	2006	£4,862,782
The Hours	2003	£4,697,689
Boogie Nights	1998	£4,439,359
The End of the Affair	2000	£3,580,132
A Single Man	2010	£3,237,855
An Ideal Husband	1999	£2,893,170
The Big Lebowski	1998	£1,903,421
Far from Heaven	2003	£1,897,904
The Kids Are All Right	2010	£1,714,613
Still Alice	2015	£1,698,527*

*Gross after 17 days. Chart excludes mainstream Hollywood movies

WHAT A RELIEF

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Any suggestion that the UK industry should stand on its own two feet misses the whole point of tax relief and public funding



By Ben Roberts

Mark Kermode's recent three-part *The Business of Film* on Radio 4 was an excellent film industry primer that could have run for much longer.

It found equal airtime for both the US studio system and the independent business, and got all our tongues wagging over some milk-spilling comments from producer-director Matthew Vaughn, whose opening salvo was that we don't actually have a film industry in the UK at all.

Vaughn's view is that the film sector in the UK is wholly dependent on tax relief and the Hollywood productions that come here for it, making the sector little more than a service provider. He also argued that British films shouldn't rely on public funding or subsidy, but stand on their own two feet. If a film isn't commercial enough to raise its finance privately, perhaps it shouldn't be made at all?

I think Vaughn enjoys being provocative, so I'm not sure to what extent he even believes his own comments, particularly as the films he has made in the UK (including his latest, *Kingsman: The Secret Service*) will have benefited from plenty of subsidy via UK tax relief, and *Harry Brown*, which Vaughn produced, was Lottery-backed.

But he wasn't happy about the BFI's support of Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin*, which received sizeable investments from ourselves and Film4, as well as the tax relief. A critical hit, *Under the Skin* took a little over £1 million at the UK box office on a limited release (*Kingsman* has cleared the £16 million mark). It was a tough sell, but we are proud of the film and I'm glad that it exists.

Vaughn's point wasn't that he didn't value the film, but rather that Glazer should have funded it himself, with the money he makes from his lucrative advertising career, instead of relying on Lottery money. I don't know how much money Glazer has, and we would never ask, as we don't have the inclination or resources to means-test filmmakers. I can say that the film wouldn't have been made if we took that approach. We weren't funding Glazer, we were funding a producer (who is always the applicant for Lottery funding), on a risky but original and potentially brilliant project.

Everyone knows that filmmaking is a really risky business, and generally it is riskier in commercial terms than a comic-book film like *Kick-Ass*, which Vaughn claimed nobody wanted to release, but which was picked up aggressively, as I remember, by Lionsgate and sold internationally by its sister company Lionsgate International.

In terms of economic benefit, every £1 of tax relief for 'Star Wars' or 'The Avengers' contributes £12 to GDP



Paws célèbre: Paul King's *Paddington*

But what of his point about our lack of an industry? In terms of economic benefit, every £1 of tax relief for *Star Wars* or *The Avengers* contributes £12 to GDP; tax relief generated £1.47 billion in spend last year, making it valuable enough to the economy for the chancellor to have just raised the level of relief in this year's budget to 25 per cent. Many tens of thousands of people work in the industry here, not including the businesses that benefit indirectly, and the production conversation doesn't factor in the distributors, independent cinemas, sales companies, marketing agencies, etc, that succeed without relying on Hollywood.

If some of our supported filmmakers move on to more mainstream careers, we can celebrate it, and the benefit doesn't always leave these shores.

Paul King is a case in point. King was a talented writer/director with a background in cult TV but untested on film when he was supported with Lottery and Film4 money to make his offbeat debut *Bunny & the Bull*. Despite a mixed response and a small box office, it gave him the credibility to develop his Paddington Bear project, first at a US studio, Warner Bros, but ultimately within the UK offices of StudioCanal, when Warners dropped it in favour of its competing *Yogi Bear*.

Despite heavy effects work from a number of UK VFX houses, and heavyweight David Heyman (*Harry Potter*) producing, *Paddington* bears all the paw prints of King from his earlier work, a charm that led to some of the best reviews of the year. The film was a huge commercial success, and we have another valuable British filmmaker on our hands. I'm not sure Paul would have been given the chance without that early public funding.

With £35 million in box office, films such as *Paddington* also allow UK distributors like StudioCanal to continue making investments in brilliant but challenging films like '71, *Catch Me Daddy*, Ben Wheatley's upcoming *High-Rise* and – yes – *Under the Skin*.

I'm glad we have filmmakers like Vaughn, but on this issue he has missed the point. Much of what we do is talent development, giving opportunities to filmmakers who don't have the resources to self-finance, and relishing a few commercial risks in the interests of diversity.

It's a much bigger picture, with a lot of hidden interdependencies. Besides, in terms of supporting a bright film culture, it's not all about the money. @bifiben

IN PRODUCTION

● **Bryan Cranston** has taken a post-*Breaking Bad* lead role as screenwriter Dalton Trumbo in director Jay Roach's upcoming biopic *Trumbo*. The film reportedly focuses on the anti-communist witch-hunts of the late 40s, when Trumbo was jailed for refusing to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee, and blacklisted in Hollywood for years thereafter. The film, which will also star Helen Mirren as legendary gossip columnist Hedda Hopper, is due at the end of the year.

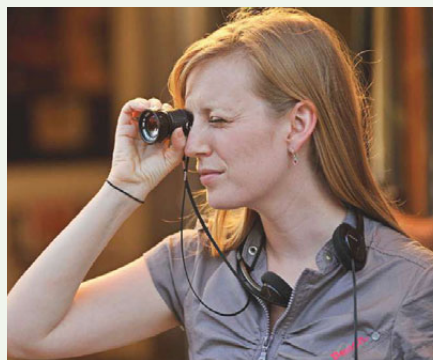
● **Emmanuel Bourdieu**, the French director also known for screenwriting on such films as Arnaud Desplechin's *A Christmas Tale*, has lined up Denis Lavant to star in his fourth feature, *Louis-Ferdinand Céline, le monstreux géant*, which is set in 1947 and focuses on the controversial French writer's exile in Denmark, Céline having collaborated with the Nazis during WWII. The news comes as Roy Andersson confirms his own ambition to direct an adaptation of Céline's angry masterpiece, *Journey to the End of the Night* (see feature, page 32).

● **Zhang Yimou** has attracted a starry international cast for his forthcoming epic *The Great Wall*, about an elite force of European mercenaries and Chinese warriors battling a monster on the Great Wall. Joining Matt Damon, Willem Dafoe and Pedro Pascal are Andy Lau, Eddie Peng and boyband member Lu Han, among others.

● **Harmony Korine** is working on the second part of what he says may become a 'Florida trilogy', following 2012's *Spring Breakers*. The *Trap* is a crime story set in the Miami hip-hop scene, and will star Idris Elba as a rapper who fears for his life when an old associate (played by Benicio Del Toro) is released from a 14-year stretch in prison, looking to exact revenge on Elba's character for marrying his girlfriend. Robert Pattinson and James Franco also star, and Al Pacino plays Del Toro's parole officer.

● **Ringo Lam**, the celebrated Hong Kong director of *City on Fire* and *Full Alert*, is in post-production on *Wild City*, his first film since 2003's *Looking for Mr. Perfect*. The noirish gangster film is due for release this summer.

● **Sarah Polley** (below), the Canadian director of *Away From Her*, is to direct an adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. No word yet on the casting, but the project is being produced by Sony's Amy Pascal, who stepped down as studio chief in the wake of last year's email hacking scandal to run her own production unit.



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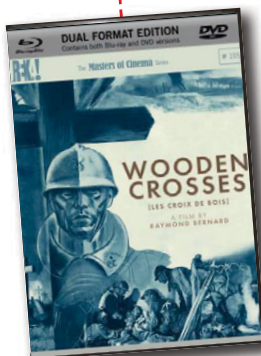
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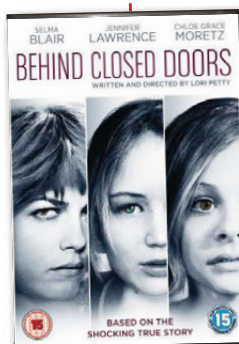


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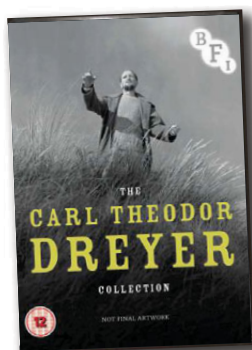


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HIGH PLAINS DRIFTERS
Viggo Mortensen's Captain Gunnar Dinesen travels to Patagonia with his daughter Ingeborg, played by Vili Björk Malling Agger, and takes part in the so-called Conquest of the Desert, in which the government set about exterminating the indigenous population



PARADISE LOST

The brutal shock of a friend's murder was the spark that inspired 'Jauja', Argentinian director Lisandro Alonso's beguiling, hallucinatory study of grief and loss, which follows a father's desperate search for his daughter in 19th-century Patagonia

By Mar Diestro-Dópido

Every so often, there's an element in a film – an atmosphere, a hidden message, an ultrasound, a white noise – that touches you at a deeper, more personal level. I couldn't figure out what it was when I first watched Lisandro Alonso's stunning fifth feature *Jauja* (pronounced how-ha, a sort of paradise on earth). It was something other than the striking visuals of the Patagonia desert, the minutely orchestrated soundtrack, the beautifully subtle, heartfelt story of a father desperately searching for his estranged daughter. In fact, I wouldn't discover what it was until I got the chance to speak to the director himself many months afterwards.

There was a gap of six years between *Liverpool* (2008), Alonso's previous feature, and *Jauja*. During this time, the director went back to live and work with his family in the countryside, met and married his wife, and became a father. In the midst of all this, he tells me over the phone from Buenos Aires, he received an email that made him freeze. That's the point at which it all clicked for me too, as Alonso's recollection jolted me back to September 2009, to a day when many of us in the film world were shaking our heads in disbelief at the devastating news that two much-loved film critics, 30-year-old Slovenian Nika Bohinc and her 28-year-old partner Filipino-Canadian Alexis Tioseco, had been murdered in their Manila home in an apparent burglary.

Alonso recalls it vividly. "It came right out of the blue and left me in complete shock. She was a friend, we had been exchanging emails about my next projects, then news of her death came. It remained so present in me, and I couldn't stop thinking about how their parents would cope with that sudden loss. That's the essence of *Jauja*. So I ended up wanting to write a story about a father who loses his daughter in a strange place he doesn't know, a completely different culture, and how he manages to keep on going despite that loss."

Shortly afterwards, Alonso introduced himself to an Argentinian poet and novelist, Fabián Casas, with whom he would eventually write the 20-page script.

During that six-year break from filmmaking, Alonso resolved to try new things on his return. A cross between a period drama and an allegorical western, *Jauja* notches up many firsts for an Alonso film: it takes place in the past, and has professional actors, scripted dialogue, artificial lighting and a non-linear structure. The narrative introduces its main characters, Danish Captain Denisen (Viggo Mortensen) and his adolescent daughter, Inge (Viilbjork Mallings Agger),



It's a strange film, difficult for me to define. Viggo Mortensen has even more delirious thoughts about it and thinks that the film could be the dog's dream

in the midst of the extermination of the indigenous inhabitants of Argentina. When Inge falls in love and runs away, Denisen's search for her leads him into something resembling a delirium when he comes across a mysterious old woman in a cave, a sequence that's followed by yet another mysterious young woman's dream. These various elements are linked by dogs and a talisman (a common guiding motif in Alonso's films), in this case a toy soldier, which lead the viewer from the 19th-century past to our own present, from Argentina to Denmark, from a small lake to the ocean.

In fact, *Jauja* had already started taking shape in 2011, when the basic elements and plot for the film were included in *Sin título* (*Carta para Serra*), the short film Alonso sent to his friend, maverick director Albert Serra, as part of the *Correspondences* series, a collection of visual letters between filmmakers. At the end of *Sin título*, Casas reads out a text that pretty much tells the story of *Jauja*, the only difference being that the protagonists, father and daughter, were originally English and not Danish. That changed as soon as Viggo Mortensen got involved, as Alonso explains: "I'd rather he was of Danish origin, like Viggo, since for Argentines, or for Latin Americans generally, listening to Danish is stranger than listening to English, French or German. This makes the story very unique, more personal, and less rooted in history books, which is what I wanted. I wanted to construct a fable that has elements of a past that has taken place, but which are not that precise and only provide guidance."

Mortensen's Captain Dinesen represents one of the many Europeans who embarked on the so-called Conquest of the Desert, part of the Argentinian government's genocidal war against the country's indigenous population. This foreign help was solicited to help organise the chaotic aftermath of the campaign, but here Dinesen is visibly lost in the environment and none of his North European ordered, rational thinking can be put to any logical use. What's more, he realises that travelling with his beautiful – and in many ways exotic – daughter to this remote part of the world was perhaps not such a good idea after all. When Inge – young and open to new adventures – speaks to him about the way the desert "fills me up", he recoils with a mixture of fear and disgust, anxieties that grow even greater when he discerns what the men in the camp are actually thinking about his "sweet girl".

It was thanks to Casas that the multi-talented Mortensen – photographer, writer, musician – got involved in the project, as they'd been friends for a while. Alonso had long been an admirer of his acting. "He's

always gone for roles that are not based too much on words – he can express with a minimum of gestures a huge range of emotions a given character is going through without having to verbalise them." Which is to say, not too dissimilar from Alonso's typically solitary male protagonists, who barely exchange a word with other people.

Mortensen, of course, delivered his own take on the character, and even wrote the opening scene (see interview, overleaf), but more than that, his involvement in the film was completely hands-on, from production to financing to music, and even to making trips back and forth to London to ensure the captain's wardrobe was as accurate as possible. "He looked for the sword, the boots, the medal from the second war that the Danes had with Germany," Alonso recalls. In fact, he proved to be a "working tool" for Alonso, whose apprehensiveness towards professional actors proved to be unfounded in this case. "I felt fortunate that I was working with him. We now have a solid relationship and, if I am lucky, we may even work on something else together."

Mortensen's polyglot background is reflected in the fact that three languages, Spanish, Danish and French, are spoken by the four main characters in the film, with miscommunication rife – particularly in the way the characters perceive the world. This is the source of many of *Jauja*'s humorous moments, especially those of a politically incorrect and deadpan kind, such as the term an Argentinian lieutenant uses to refer to the indigenous people: "*cabezas de coco*" or "coconut heads". This phrase was invented for the script and, according to Alonso, purposefully "sounds strange, because we didn't want to offend anyone. All these humorous traits are there to bring the characters back to earth" in order for them to find a way of "dealing with this historical period in a way that is not solemn". In fact, that lack of solemnity applies particularly to the 'recreation' of this historical period, where only a few props are used – a uniform here, an old compass there. *Jauja* is most definitely not a period piece, more the illusion of one. "It's like when you go to the theatre and you have to make-believe, even if everything is taking place inside a black box," Alonso suggests.

It is this newfound impetus towards artificiality and illusion – as opposed to the more naturalistic feel of his previous work – that led Alonso to seek out Finnish DP Timo Salminen, Aki Kaurismäki's regular collaborator. "If I'm honest, it was more a case of learning from him than working with him. I wanted him to apply a bit of a Scandinavian eye, to show the South American colours and the light from Viggo's character's perspective." The





result is outstanding, an eerie, heightened naturalism in which Salminen's harsh, flat – or, to use Alonso's word – “punk” light, bluntly illuminates night scenes, where in theory light could only come from a bonfire or candle. It works perfectly to defamiliarise the world, signalling right from the off that something is not quite right. And although certain naturalistic traits and elements remain, Salminen's photography is already guiding the viewer towards what is ultimately one of the most breathtaking journeys into the subconscious in cinema.

Much has been written about the film's aspect ratio: Salminen himself has stated that he wanted a John Ford look. In fact, it was shot in standard 1.85:1, and only later did its 1.33:1 ratio (square with rounded corners, typical of silent cinema) come about, when Alonso came across it during post-production. “I realised it provided a better angle and perspective,” he says, and it does indeed suit the austere vastness of the desert landscape, giving the frame a palpable depth and an agoraphobic sense of limitlessness, in which Mortensen's solitary figure feels belittled, and hopelessly lost.

As mentioned, Alonso's films are populated by solitary male figures, all but one of them being fathers making a trip into the wild in search of their daughters – quests that ultimately turn out to be existential and directed inwards. In *Jauja*, we even hear of a certain Colonel Zuluaga, the epitome of an army man, who has deserted and is now hunting his former comrades-in-arms while dressed as a woman, another strange, blackly comic touch. There are three female presences in *Jauja* – Inge, the old woman Dinesen meets in the cave, and ultimately an adolescent girl in our own present – and although they all disappear at some point during the story, one could argue that they become a sort of structuring absence. “It is the desert that unleashes passion in Inge, her love for another soldier, for adventures, for romance, leading to tragedy,” explains Alonso. “Which is what happened to Nika Bohinc. She

fell in love and, driven by her feelings, she travelled to a place where it all ended in a fatal accident.”

There is a strong implication in the film that these women might actually all be the same woman, which Alonso appears to corroborate, relating it both to his own and the captain's loss. “No matter how hard the captain tries to find his daughter, she isn't there anymore. But she may reappear, because maybe we need to look for her in different guises, in different places. And perhaps in this way it's easier for us to carry on living, so that our lives have a bit of meaning – to find those beings who disappear along the way in other forms, in other people, so we don't lose sight of them.”

At the start of the film *'jauja'* is defined in text on screen as “a mythological land of abundance and happiness”. We are told that while many people have searched for it, the only thing that is known for certain is that “all those who tried to find this earthly paradise got lost on the way”. It's only when the captain has been forced to shed his rationality and rigidity, when he opens up to the desert, as his daughter does, that he is able to see her in the world around him – in a toy soldier, in an old woman, in a dog... So maybe *'jauja'* is a paradox: you can only find what you are looking for – your paradise, your adventure, your El Dorado – when you are free enough to get lost.

“It's a strange film, difficult for me to define,” Alonso says. “It's like what happens to me every day. I start thinking about why certain things happen to me, or how things should be, and in the end I get exhausted, so I tell myself, “Tomorrow will be another day.” Viggo has even more delirious thoughts about the film, and thinks that it could be the dog's dream. In the end, I probably use film as an excuse not to think too much – to be able to liberate yourself somehow, to not have to put up with yourself.”



***Jauja* is released in UK cinemas on 10 April and is reviewed on page 66**

LAND OF PLENTY
Viggo Mortensen (below, far left) goes on a quest to find his daughter after she elopes with a young soldier (below, left), in a journey into the subconscious directed by Lisandro Alonso (on set with Mortensen, above)

LIVING THE DREAM

'Jauja' star Viggo Mortensen traces the personal history that drew him to Lisandro Alonso's dreamlike fable and explains why the director is unique among modern filmmakers

By Mar Diestro-Dópidio

Ever since *Jauja* premiered in Cannes last year in the Un Certain Regard section, where it took the Fipresci award, its star Viggo Mortensen's dedication to promoting it has been nothing less than total. As director Lisandro Alonso told me, "He put the film's T-shirt on and he's still out there, promoting it around the world." I caught up with Mortensen in the midst of his *Jauja* cavalcade – albeit in a tailored suit – during last year's BFI London Film Festival.

Mar Diestro-Dópidio: How did you get involved in *Jauja*?

Viggo Mortensen: I met Lisandro briefly in 2006 and we spoke a little bit, but not about work. Then, in 2011, a mutual friend, Fabián Casas, a poet and novelist, told me he was doing something with Lisandro, and Lisandro wanted to talk to me about it. It sounded intriguing – a classic adventure-quest story in a way. But, directed by Lisandro, I knew it would have a certain visual quality and rhythm. I liked that idea, the combination of something traditional with his sensibility as a director and as an artist. I thought it would be interesting for me personally too, because of my Danish roots and having grown up in Argentina.

MDD: Were you involved in developing the character?

VM: Yes, definitely, especially because of the Danish aspect. The way my character speaks Spanish and the way he tries to figure things out is just like my Danish dad, so that was fun to do. And [I concluded that] the more specifically I conceptualised the character in terms of his background – his actual regiment, what 19th-century wars he would have fought in, where he was from, his approach to dealing with this culture in this place – the more universal the story would feel. His daughter is more open to adapting to the landscape and the culture, whereas he sees it as something to be tamed, even if it's well-intentioned – that colonial mindset of, "This is strange and very interesting, but we'll have to make it fit into our way of thinking." It's like a Danish *Don Quixote*. He isn't ridiculous but he is absurd. Wherever possible I tried to push that further by drawing on a certain Danish



'An artist who asks questions': director Lisandro Alonso (right) with Viggo Mortensen

everyman quality that is absurd in that place.

MDD: You also collaborated on the soundtrack?

VM: Lisandro's not used to having music in his movies, but he thought there was a transitional moment in the film that needed a piece of music, so he described what he wanted. Given we didn't have much of a budget, I mentioned I had some things I had the rights to that I'd composed and/or played on. I sent him a bunch of stuff and he liked it a lot. He has a really great sense for rhythm, how sound and images work together.

MDD: Did you stick to the script?

VM: There were little added details here and there, but basically we shot the script, with the exception of the first scene – that was something we added during the shoot. The sound guy [Catriel Vildosola] had been talking to Lisandro because he felt there was something missing before the daughter runs away, evidence of the affection between them. So at the last minute, right

on the spot, I basically wrote that scene on a piece of paper and presented it to the actress. I asked Lisandro what he thought about it and he said, "That's great." We only had time to do it in two takes before the sun went down on our last day on that location. That's what Lisandro is good at. You need luck to do something special, but you have to know what to do if it arrives.

MDD: It's unusual to see a Hollywood star in an Argentinian art film – why did you think it was important to support Lisandro's work?

VM: Because there's no one else like him, he's a complete filmmaker. When you talk to him, he actually says, "I don't know, I have no answers." But he does know what he's doing. He's not trying to hide that; he's just expressing himself with the movie. He is an artist who asks questions and not an artist who gives answers. We all like to categorise movies – this is like Tarkovsky or Sokurov or Pedro Costa, or whoever – but in the end it's a frustrating exercise, because Lisandro is not like anyone else. He doesn't reference in any overt way other filmmakers or movies. He's doing his own thing. There are not that many storytellers or filmmakers who are completely original and I think he's one of the few. **S**

There are not many storytellers or filmmakers who are completely original and Lisandro Alonso is one of the few



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THE FUGITIVE KIND

In lesser hands, 'Cry of the City', Robert Siodmak's classic noir about a policeman hunting a cop-killer, might have been just another fast-paced chase movie, but as a director who always prioritised psychology over suspense, his gift for characterisation lifts the drama clear of its genre roots

By Imogen Sara Smith

Spoiler alert: this feature reveals several plot twists



The title and basic outline of *Cry of the City* (1948) might suggest that it belongs to a post-World War II cycle of urban crime movies influenced by neorealism and wartime documentaries – films such as *The Naked City* (1948), *The Sleeping City* (1950) and *City That Never Sleeps* (1953). But *Cry of the City* is different: there are no bird's-eye views of the skyline here, no omniscient voiceover invoking the metropolis as a character, and little in the way of documentary footage. Instead, there are intense, intimate scenes in a series of cramped interiors – a hospital, a jail cell, a tenement apartment, an office, a car, a subway station, a church. Director Robert Siodmak was a master of chamber *noir*, dwelling on the complicated, ingrown dynamics of family and romantic relationships.

Siodmak belonged to the generation of Jewish directors who fled Germany and Austria to escape the Nazis, and whose arrival in Hollywood was a crucial factor in the development of *film noir*. No director was more closely linked to the genre; nearly all of the American films for which Siodmak is remembered are *noir*, marked by elliptical narrative structures, expressionistic shadows and a recurring theme of self-destructive obsession. In other hands, *Cry of the City* might have been a fast-paced chase movie, a cops and robbers procedural. But Siodmak was always more interested in psychology than in suspense – though he was quite adept at shredding nerves, as proven here by a brilliantly staged jail break in which the escapee must walk slowly down a long concrete tunnel, in a scene scored with a muffled drumbeat that thumps like a heart.

Cry of the City tells the tale of a policeman chasing a fugitive cop-killer, but it is far more than that; it is about the battle for hearts and minds between the two men, as they alternately vie for leverage and influence in a series of encounters marked by what James Harvey (in a chapter on Siodmak in *Movie Love in the Fifties*) aptly calls “transactions of personal dominance”. Lieutenant Candella (Victor Mature) is determined not only to capture Martin Rome (Richard Conte), but to turn the hoodlum's family, allies and lovers against him. He knows that Marty is a charismatic charmer whose best weapon is not a gun or a knife, but a gift for seducing and manipulating people into helping him.

Badly injured in a shootout with the police and on the run after escaping from a prison hospital, Rome is in much the same predicament as Johnny McQueen, the dying Irish rebel in Carol Reed's *Odd Man Out* (1947). But while James Mason plays Johnny as a powerless observer of his own fate, an embodiment of mortality and a beautiful martyr, Conte endows Martin Rome with feverish, electric energy, even when he is too weak to rise from a bed. Defiant, remorseless and irrepressibly flip-pant, Marty turns the tables on authorities and would-be aggressors. Chained to a hospital bed, he taunts the police when they come to grill him: “I'm full of bullet holes... Beat me? I die. Yell at me? I faint.” Later, dragging his injured leg, crumpling with pain and fatigue, he is as dangerous as a wounded animal, yet he never loses the proud *élan* and silky elegance that were Conte's trademarks. The son of an Italian barber, Richard (born Nicholas) Conte grew up across the river from New York in Jersey City, and his strong accent and vibrant Italian hand gestures contribute largely to the authentic flavor of the film's Little Italy setting.

Like Hitchcock, Siodmak preferred the greater control allowed by filming on sets; *Cry of the City* is unusual among his films for being shot partly in real New York locations. He managed to use interiors that are at once

palpably real – the whole film has the feel of stale, close air and damp, gritty asphalt – and as dramatically expressive as sets. The apartment of the Rome family is richly atmospheric, with its clutter of religious icons and look of respectable poverty. You can all but smell the home-made minestrone that Marty's mother (Mimi Aguglia) sends to him in jail. There is a sad little scene in which his father (Tito Vuolo), forced to resign from the Catholic social and charitable organisation Knights of Columbus because of his son's transgressions, returns the emblems of his membership with great dignity and formality.

Candella belongs to this world too; even as he hunts for Marty, he behaves like a member of the family, calling Mrs Rome “Mama”, and assuming a big-brotherly stance toward the younger siblings. (Despite the way he was often typecast, Victor Mature was neither Italian nor a New Yorker, and while he is not unconvincing he, like his character, lacks the colour and panache of his co-star.) Candella's hatred of Rome is personal, fuelled by the kind of resentment a good son feels for the prodigal brother who is loved despite his sins. Screenwriter Curt Siodmak said that there was an intense sibling rivalry between him and older brother Robert, and this theme plays out vividly in several of the director's films (*The Strange Affair of Uncle Harry*, *The Dark Mirror*). In fact, the script (by Richard Murphy, with uncredited contributions by Ben Hecht) might be stronger if this theme were played up. As it is, Candella's character suffers from being reduced to the voice of law and order, always right and never interesting.

Visiting Rome in jail, the cop asks, “Was it worth it?” – meaning a life of crime that is slated to end in the electric chair. Maybe, shrugs the hoodlum, because he made a lot of money and had a lot of fun, and what does the cop have to show for his virtue? “I sleep good at nights,” Candella answers stolidly. “Yeah, in some cheap room,” Marty retorts, with a triumphant smile and a dismissive gesture. What is significant in this scene is that the two men's arguments count for nothing; their



LIFE OF CRIME
Hope Emerson as the masseuse Rose Given and Richard Conte as cop-killer Martin Rome (left); and Rome at the family home of his nemesis, Lieutenant Candella, played by Victor Mature (seated, above)

The glamour of outlaws always posed a problem for Hollywood crime movies. The enforcers of the Code seem not to have realised that doomed criminals become even more romantic

styles count for everything. Marty is as quick and sharp as the switchblade he brandishes in several scenes; Candella is heavy and slow, with Mature's beefy build and droopy eyes, like a man who has gorged on too much *fettuccine alfredo*. There is, to put it bluntly, no contest.

The glamour of outlaws always posed a problem for classic Hollywood crime movies, even as it underlay their popularity. *Cry of the City* was made during the reign of the Production Code, which decreed that films must not glorify criminals, that they must show transgressors being punished and illustrate that crime does not pay. The enforcers of the Code seem not to have realised that doomed criminals become even more romantic. We root for Rome not only because he is more attractive than Candella, but because he is weak and threatened, a man condemned to death and dying anyway, convicted of one crime and falsely accused of another.

When we first see Marty, a priest is muttering the last rites over him as weeping family members keep vigil by his bed. Barely conscious, he summons the last of his strength to whisper, "Go fry" when a crooked lawyer tries to convince him to take the rap for a jewel robbery that he didn't do. This unsolved case, in which an old woman was tortured and killed by two men and a female accomplice, is the plot device that drives the action, as Marty exerts all his craftiness and fierce will to clear his girlfriend Teena (Debra Paget) of suspicion.

The young, beautiful, innocent Teena is talked of throughout the movie – searched for, threatened, protected – but glimpsed only briefly. The women we do see are far more interesting and less idealised – for instance, the homely, middle-aged Nurse Pruett (Betty Garde), who cares for Marty in the hospital. Standing up to the police, she is a competent, no-nonsense professional; yet she is helplessly vulnerable to the charms of her handsome patient, who knows it and uses his wiles shamelessly, asking her to feel his face after he's been shaved. Miss Pruett disappears from the story for a long time after Marty gets what he wants from her – a promise to hide Teena from the police – and when we see her again it is at home, where she lives with her nagging, selfish old mother. The weight of weariness, loneliness and quiet frustration that Betty Garde brings to these two small scenes give the film a sombre ballast.

LIVES OF QUIET DESPERATION

Crime is not the only netherworld of cruelty and desperation: the manhunt opens windows on to the city's many corners of furtive misery. The day after Marty's anxious ex-girlfriend Brenda (Shelley Winters) finds an unlicensed foreign doctor to patch up his wounds in the back of a car – parking outside a neon-lit strip of nightclubs to provide some light – the police round up a roomful of unlicensed foreign doctors. They are all European wartime refugees, like Siodmak: dignified and distinguished men now forced into humiliating compromises. The doctor in this case, who needed money for his sick wife, is caught when he's recognised by a lech who was drunkenly trying to pick up Brenda – an accident of urban life that might be funny if it weren't so sad.

The film is vastly enriched by the offbeat specificity of the supporting characters, not one of whom is a cipher. Towering above them all is the masseuse Rose Given

(Hope Emerson), the jewel-robbery accomplice whom Marty finally tracks down. She enters in a brilliant deep-focus shot, advancing toward the camera down a long hallway, turning lights on as she approaches, getting bigger and bigger until she almost blots out the screen. Emerson was over six feet tall and heavily built; she dwarfs Conte, and this scene is the most fascinatingly complex in terms of "transactions of personal dominance". Marty is slumped in a chair, weak with exhaustion and loss of blood, as Rose looms over him. Yet as he lays out the terms of a deal (he now has the jewels, and will trade them for safe passage out of the country), they flirt and banter. There is fear and greed and distrust and latent violence between them, yet the tone of their encounter is light, teasing, even caressing; they recognise and appreciate each other as dangerous.

"You're a cute little man," Rose coos, and treats him to a massage. As he relaxes with the sensual pleasure, Rose talks about how she has to waste her gift on "fat old women, with too much money and too many jewels. They think the jewels make them beautiful, and they fight to keep them, like they fight the years." Suddenly her hands move up to grip Marty's throat. Over breakfast the next day, Rose talks casually about her fondness for cooking, how she wants the jewels so she can buy a farm and have fresh eggs every day. The film's startling juxtapositions of violent crime and everyday life are personified by this monstrous woman, whose hands move so easily from healing to strangling, who will torture and kill to achieve a wholesome dream of owning a farm.

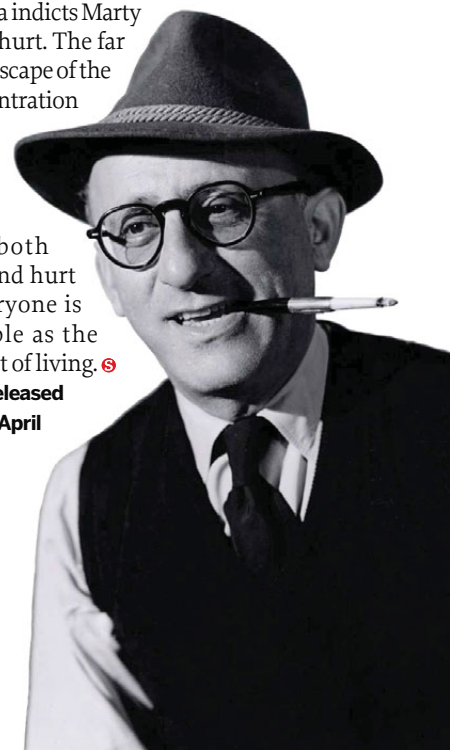
Symmetries give the film an elegant structure and also suggest equivalences between apparent opposites. The staging of Marty's first meeting with Rose echoes his confrontation with her partner Niles (Berry Kroeger), a smirking, oily shyster. Marty gets behind him and stabs him with a switchblade through the back of his desk chair. Candella, like his quarry, escapes from a hospital bed after he's been shot, and drags himself through the city streets. The shadowy church where the two wounded men have their final encounter recalls the hushed, church-like hospital ward in the opening scene. In an accusatory speech that reveals how his obsessive hatred has metastasised, Candella indicts Marty for all the people he has hurt. The far more nuanced moral landscape of the film undercuts this concentration of blame – we have seen how people make their own choices and harbour their own motives.

We recognise that both crime and the law use and hurt people. In the end, everyone is hurt; it is as inescapable as the weather. It is the city's cost of living. ❧



***Cry of the City* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 17 April and is playing in the 'Robert Siodmak: Prince of Shadows' season, which runs throughout April and May at BFI Southbank, London**

PATHS OF EXILE
Robert Siodmak (right) came from a generation of Jewish directors who fled Germany and Austria to escape the Nazis, and whose arrival in Hollywood was one of the crucial factors in the development of film noir





"AN ENGROSSING, SENSITIVE AND ADMIRABLY NUANCED SOCIAL DRAMA"
THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

GENTE DE BIEN TBC

GOOD INTENTIONS

A FILM BY **FRANCO LLOLLI**

BRAYAN SANTAMARÍA CARLOS FERNANDO PÉREZ ALEJANDRA BORRERO

WITH SANTIAGO MARTÍNEZ, SOFÍA RIVAS. SCREENPLAY BY FRANCO LLOLLI, CATHERINE PAILLÉ. WITH THE COLLABORATION OF VIRGINIE LEBEAUY. CINEMATOGRAPHY BY OSCAR DURÁN. SOUND: MATTHEU PERROT. JOSEFINA RODRÍGUEZ. SAMUEL AICHOUN. EDITED BY NICOLAS DESMAISON. JULIE DUCLAUX. PRODUCTION DESIGNER: MARCELA GÓMEZ. PRODUCTION MANAGERS: DANIEL GARCÍA, MARÍA FERNANDA BARRIENTOS, PAOLA PÉREZ. PRODUCED BY GREGOIRE DEBAILLY. CO-PRODUCED BY FRANCO LLOLLI. WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF FONDO PARA EL DESARROLLO CINEMATOGRAFICO COLOMBIA, AD VITAM, VERSATILE, LA FONDATION, GAN, EFO COLOMBIA, VISIONS SUD EST. WITH THE SUPPORT OF LA REGION ÎLE DE FRANCE, CICLIC REGION CENTRE, REGION BASSE-NORMANDIE, MAISON DE L'EMISE. DISTRIBUTION: NETWORK RELEASING. INTERNATIONAL SALES AGENT: VERSATILE.

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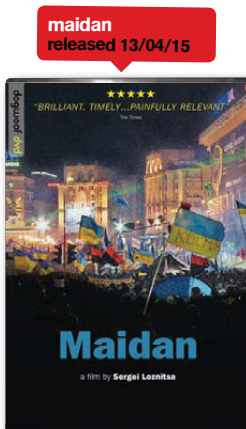
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THINGS FALL APART

A mysterious outbreak of mass fainting at a rural English girls' school at the end of the 1960s is the enigma that lies at the heart of 'The Falling', Carol Morley's beautiful, haunting exploration of adolescent female friendship and sexuality

By Sophie Mayer



SCHOOL DAZE

At a remote Oxfordshire boarding school (below), Lydia (Maisie Williams, right with umbrella) falls in love with her best friend Abbie (Florence Pugh, right) and starts to mimic her symptoms when she falls prey to a psychogenic illness, which soon spreads throughout the school



Carol Morley's current email sign-off is a quotation attributed to Albert Einstein: "Once you can accept the universe as matter expanding into nothing that is something, wearing stripes with plaid comes easy." It speaks to the vivid originality and daring of her film language: take the talking heads that appear spectrally on the TV watched by Joyce Vincent (Zawe Ashton) in Morley's experimental documentary *Dreams of a Life* (2011), or the invisible filmmaker needling his subject from off-camera in her short *Stalin My Neighbour* (2004). And now we have *The Falling*, a school-set drama that's as much concerned with lush, shimmering leaf-strewn waterscapes shot by Agnès Godard with 1960s lenses as it is with assemblies of uniformed girls. Morley's subjects are often – as the title of her first fiction feature *Edge* (2010) suggests – on the margins. Her films do not just accept entropy, but embrace its implications with generosity and curiosity, from dispassionately examining her own drinking in her second film, *The Alcohol Years* (2000), to her determination to rediscover Vincent via the small ads.

Dreams of a Life was the first of her films to catch the public imagination. It started from almost nothing, a tiny paragraph in a newspaper about the finding of Vincent's body, and expanded into a story that draws in not only MP Lynne Featherstone but even Nelson Mandela. Totally specific to Vincent's experience and yet universal in its exploration of alienation and erasure, *Dreams* announced Morley as part of a wave of British filmmakers, including Lynne Ramsay, Clio Barnard and Andrea Arnold, who are busy fraying the edges of documentary and social realism with the surreal, the erotic and the metaphysical. The film was accompanied by an interactive web project written by A.L. Kennedy, novelist and screenwriter of Coky Giedroyc's *Stella Does Tricks* (1996), and Morley's work echoes the innovative fiction, at once intimate and imaginative, of contemporary writers such as Kennedy, Janice Galloway and Ali Smith.

The Falling is framed by readings from William Wordsworth's poem 'The Prelude' and at its heart is Lydia 'Lamb' Lamont (Maisie Williams), with her Blakean nickname. Like all adolescents, Lydia feels both like the centre of the world and as if she's fallen off its edge; the film enters her perspective closely, so that it is both cosmic in its implications and compellingly subjective in its focus. Lydia is falling in love with her best friend Abbie (Florence Pugh), and then falling in with Abbie's sudden physical symptoms when she suffers fainting spells. Through the outbreak of mass psychogenic illness

Abbie prompts, we watch Lydia and her school friends twitch and swoon repeatedly, as if in thrall to a previously undocumented 1960s dance craze: not the twist, but the falling.

Things fall apart in Morley's film and, in W.B. Yeats's words, "The centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." The uptight England of the 1950s is falling away from innocence into experience, as are the girls, like the leaves in the autumnal back-to-school landscapes. But any moral connotations of 'The Fall' are held in suspension: Lydia is no sacrificial victim, but an Alice entering an alternative reality, opened up by her ability to fall, unafraid.

Sophie Mayer: What is 'the falling,' on a literal level? The academic Elisabeth Bronfen suggests that 19th-century hysteria was a sort of feminist performance art protest rather than anything biological.

Carol Morley: The old medical definition of hysteria – a 'wandering' of the womb [ie, a displaced uterus] – is strange but fascinating to explore, because women have been associated with it for so long. I think that what we now call mass psychogenic illnesses reflect the anxieties of their time. Nowadays, our anxieties are to do with pollution: people associate outbreaks with a chemical leak, or food poisoning.

In the late 60s, ideas were being circulated about female emancipation and sexuality, and it felt to me that a lot of the outbreaks at that time were around the threat of this new sexual being. A 16-year-old girl's sexuality, even now, is seen as threatening: it's very difficult for people to talk about. So mass psychogenic illness was a beautiful way of looking in *extremis* at women, both celebrating their sexuality and their interest in sex, and also a sense of how threatening it becomes to others.

SM: How did you develop the movement language of 'the falling,' which is almost dance-like?

CM: Girls from Le Roy High School [in New York State, where 12 girls simultaneously developed involuntary tics in 2012] have put videos of themselves on YouTube, and you can see that the movements are really quite pronounced – but [for my film] I wanted them to come from within, to be right for each actor. They did learn to fall, because health and safety wanted us to use big mats, and I wanted to film the floor. So we worked with movement coordinator Sue Lefton to make sure the girls could fall on the floor. They learned as a group, which was a real bonding exercise.

But it wasn't just about the fainting: you'll notice





all the girls are sitting up straight, knees together. Sue's in her 60s, the age those girls would be now, so she remembered her schooldays. To chew gum, let alone smoke a cigarette, at a girls' grammar school would have been taboo: you would fear your teachers.

SM: The film's set in 1969, in rural Oxfordshire, and there's a powerful feeling of change coming but not quite yet – as when one of the girls, Titch [Rose Caton], points out to Abbie that abortion is available [having been legalised in 1967], and Abbie says, “But not for us.”

CM: Anyone teaching then would have gone through World War II; they would have been born close to the Victorian era and have gone through very austere times, and now would be seeing this 60s malarkey. The swinging 60s only took place on the King's Road, but everyone would have known that their lives were going to be different. 1969 was on the cusp of the comprehensive transformation, and a school like the one that Lydia and Abbie attend would have been under threat, so my advice to Monica Dolan [who plays headmistress Miss Alvaro] was, “Just think you might be losing this.” It was a very adolescent time, a time of great hope, a time that didn't quite know what it was.

SM: The era and its sense of emergence comes across atmospherically, through the music and mood, rather than from production design. Was that a deliberate strategy?

CM: I hate period films when you see a road of vintage

I am interested in representing girls and women behaving in all sorts of ways, and pushing the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour

cars and that kind of signage of: “This is 1969.” I really wanted to look at internal landscape. It was about feeling a sense of nature pressing in. The school location had been unused for 17 years so it had a very eerie quality. For me, it's a place in the mind. Because mass psychogenic illness is so unexplained and so strange, in order to unpack it, and to unpack the 60s, you begin to look at magical elements of place. When I was preparing, I watched the DVD set of [Granada Television series] *The Owl Service*, adapted in 1969 from Alan Garner's novel, because it's set at the same time and full of mysticism and the occult.

SM: As well as references to “magick... with a k” made by Lydia's older brother Kenneth [Joe Cole], the film refers to the moon landing. Fantasy meets technology in a way that gives the film an almost science-fictional feel.

CM: Lydia's mother Eileen [Maxine Peake] can't leave the house, and yet man has landed on the moon. Historically, women have been associated with domesticity and men with the world, and I wanted to explore that, to spend less time thinking about domesticity. I remembered that when I was about 13 I was reading a lot of science fiction. The books that attracted me weren't so much about aliens, they were about ideas: I remember a particular one called *Women of Wonder* [edited by Pamela Sargent, 1975], which was a collection of female science-fiction writers and that had a real impact on me.

SM: Eileen does seem truly locked in: not only to the house, but also in Maxine Peake's performance. You take an actor known for her electrifying, direct gaze, and have her looking down throughout. Why?

CM: I had it in the script that Eileen couldn't look at her daughter, so her gaze is always averted. It's very difficult for an actor to act without looking at someone, so that was quite a challenge. For Eileen, I wanted something very restricted: someone who is wearing a mask, someone who is stuck in the 50s and can't move out of it and acknowledge what's around her. She's so disconnected and tangled up internally.

SM: Without giving anything away, we could say she reconnects – or wakes up. One of my favourite scenes in the film is Lydia's *If....* moment, where she yells at the school assembly, “Wake up!”

CM: I love it because it's a young girl getting power over a moment. I wish I'd done that at school. I did look again at *If....* [Lindsay Anderson, 1968], but also at *Picnic at Hanging Rock* [Peter Weir, 1975], *A Swedish Love Story* [Roy Anderson, 1970], *Sweetie* [Jane Campion, 1989], *Heavenly Creatures* [Peter Jackson, 1994], *The Devils* [Ken Russell, 1971] and the TV series of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* [1978] with Geraldine McEwan.

Especially after *Dreams of a Life*, which was about social isolation, this film was about collectivity. Even though Lydia becomes isolated, what she's after is a collective, the sense that, “Together we could do something.” I feel Lydia's a leader of a wave that could have happened: she has become politicised through being confronted with her own sense of who she is.

SM: Part of that is her sexuality: it's great that *The Falling* screened as part of BFI Flare, given that female bisexuality is often rendered invisible or trivialised as ‘just a crush’.

CM: *The Falling*, while it could be seen as being about many things, is also a love story: a story of two girls and unrequited love. Recognition that the film explores female sexuality and all its complicated and transgressive

possibilities is important to me. It was important to celebrate the complexity of adolescent female sexuality in a way that I don't think has been done so much, because often the people who get to make the films haven't experienced it.

I am interested in representing girls and women behaving in all sorts of ways, and pushing the boundaries of socially acceptable behaviour. *Vagabond* [Agnès Varda, 1985] is definitely one of my favourite films: how it pieces together a life, and how it looks very particularly at a female identity through both female subjectivity and how a woman is perceived by others.

SM: Just as the cast on screen is predominantly female, so was the crew behind the scenes, with Agnès Godard and Tracey Thorn occupying two key roles – DP and composer – that are often male-dominated. How did that come about?

CM: Without any design or sense of being right-on, we had a large female crew. If diverse people get access and manage to make a film, whether it's disabled people, black people or women, you're probably going to end up with a very diverse crew, because you'll see more people, see potential in people, and have more diverse contacts.

With Agnès Godard [known for her long-running collaboration with director Claire Denis], I really admired her work, and I really wanted to work with someone who had done more feature films than I had. I found her email and wrote to her, and she wrote back saying, "Send me the script." And we clicked. Even though she's been shooting films for 40 years, she'd say every time would be like her first time, and I feel like that's a good approach. I told her I wanted it to feel as though we had found the film, and hadn't made it, and she got hooked on this idea. We kept talking about what it meant to find a film and not make a film, and I'm not sure we ever quite got the answer, but it kept us on our toes.

With Tracey, I had a dream while we were shooting that she'd scored the film, probably because the DIY attitude of her first band, Marine Girls, influenced the idea of the Alternative School Orchestra in the film. I managed to get her on Twitter – she's big on Twitter – then phoned her up. She said, "Oh, I've never done a soundtrack before..." I showed her about five minutes' footage, and she created the music with the instruments the girls had used. She didn't have preconceived ideas about what a film score should be. It's electric. You can create something you've never thought of, in the juxtaposition.

SM: Is that how you approach filmmaking as well?

CM: I try to forget I've done anything before and throw myself into a position where I'm completely terrified. I did a short film called *The Madness of the Dance* in 2006 about mass psychogenic illness, and I knew I wanted to do a longer film, but I tried to look afresh and think, "What am I trying to tell?" I like to plan a lot and know exactly what I'm going to shoot, but then when I come to it, do something completely different. That can induce something remarkable.

My time at Central St Martins made me aware of many experimental filmmakers, such as Maya Deren, Carolee Schneemann and Lis Rhodes; we were lucky because Stan Brakhage came to talk at the college. I realised it wasn't just about telling stories, but how stories are told, and so I became very interested in form, and how you construct films.

SM: Unlike *Dreams*, *The Falling* has a linear narrative – on the surface. But there are the recurring, rapid inserts of violent and traumatic scenes, and they could be flashbacks or flashforwards...

CM: I like the idea they could be flashforwards. Chris Wyatt, the film's editor, and I had so many theoretical conversations about time. We were calling them subliminals; they're not quite subliminals, but they're one or two frames I'd put in. They were in the script – actually, lots of people wanted me to get rid of them. It was hard to write them on the page, but they had to be written in order to film them.

The legacy of deep-seated things that happen when you're younger, they definitely shape who you are; as repressed as they often are, they will resurface. I'll always be fascinated with that and its re-examination. When you freeze the frame, you feel like you have some control of life, which is very difficult to control, so it's quite reassuring. I hope when the DVD comes out, somebody freezes the frames: they tell a story in their own right.

SM: So there's a mystery within the mystery. Was that how you experienced making the film?

CM: I do have mysticism a bit about film. With every film, I have a point where I feel I'm not making it: it was meant to be, through the power of the group involved. The energy creates something that didn't exist before. ☺

i **The Falling is released in UK cinemas on 24 April and is reviewed on page 76**

CIRCLE OF TRUST

Director Carol Morley (left) instructed Maxine Peake (below left, as Eileen) never to look directly in the eye of her character's daughter, Lydia (seen with her friends at school, below right), as a way to express Eileen's sense of social and cultural entrapment



SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE

The morose, sardonic genius on show in Roy Andersson's *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* plays like the melancholy inheritor of fellow Nordic miserabilists August Strindberg, Edvard Munch and Søren Kierkegaard – but with much better jokes

By Jonathan Romney

Yes, there are moments of joy in *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, the new film by Swedish director Roy Andersson, but you can count them on the fingers of one hand. Four of them are the briefest vignettes – little glimmers of, if not euphoria, then at least respite amid the ocean of glumness in which Andersson's characters mostly tread water to survive. A mother smiles at her baby; children blow bubbles on a balcony; a couple kiss on a beach while their dog stands guard; more equivocally, a woman puts a consoling arm around a man's shoulders as he scowls at the world from his window. In the earthly hell that is Andersson's domain, this is as good as it gets.

Since the start of this century, Andersson has become synonymous with a style of melancholic Nordic intensity that would do honour not just to Ingmar Bergman but to Strindberg, Munch and Kierkegaard. The title of his new film is a nod to the birds in the trees, observing humanity from above, in Bruegel's painting *Hunters in the Snow*. But Andersson has changed them from crows to a single pigeon – indeed, a stuffed pigeon in a museum vitrine, gaped at by humans who might as well be stuffed themselves.

Yet Andersson's trilogy of features composed of loosely linked sketches – the previous episodes being *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) and *You, the Living* (2007) – also sets out to make us laugh, with a comic style as caustic as it is deadpan. *A Pigeon...* features a lovely play on the opposition – or inseparable duality – of joy and gloom as it follows Jonathan and Sam, two down-at-heel, down-in-the-mouth salesmen of jokes and novelties. They only have three items in their catalogue: vampire teeth, a bagful of hysterical laughter and a hideous rubber mask ('Uncle One-Tooth') that seems designed to elicit depression rather than mirth. "We want to help people have a good time," the duo insist dourly, but if amusement is to be had here in any way, it comes from the bleak comedy of the pair's weary desperation. Their story pays off in a bone-dry gag that could be at Andersson's own expense: as a third party listens to Jonathan glumly holding forth

about the human condition, Sam flatly observes, "He's being a little philosophical."

Or perhaps this is Andersson mounting a defence of his idiosyncratic form of humour as philosophy. The three parts of his "trilogy about being a human being", as the opening title of *A Pigeon...* calls it, are not only thematically and structurally very close, but stylistically uniform. Each is a compendium of loosely linked episodes, in which a huge cast of woebegone Everyman and Everywoman figures take their place in elaborate, meticulously choreographed tableaux, shot on sometimes vast sets with fixed cameras. The episodes include muted slapstick routines and alarmingly morbid gags staged and shot with absolute poker-face detachment. Unaware how close they are to death, Andersson's people look already dead, their pallid make-up suggesting a midpoint between Beckettian clown and freshly exhumed cadaver. Make-up, costumes and sets are all designed in a palette that Michael Bracewell, reviewing *Songs from the Second Floor* in *S&S* in 2001, described as "the colours of cold veal, sour milk and sweating mildew". There's no major departure from this format in *A Pigeon...*; the essence of Andersson's comedies lies in their radical similarity as matching panels of a single triptych. But if – formally, at least – Andersson has only one thing to say, he keeps offering audacious new variations on his vision.

As usual, Andersson shot most of *A Pigeon...* in Studio 24, his facility in Stockholm where he builds his sets, making a self-contained universe in which everything is controlled and manifestly artificial. After his first two, altogether more conventional, features, *A Swedish Love Story* (1970) and *Giliap* (1975), Andersson spent 25 years developing a unique authored brand of TV commercial, black comedy sketches that yielded the style – and for the first two chapters, much of the budget – of his trilogy.

Over the phone from Stockholm, Andersson discusses his career in English; given his artistic reputation as an all-controlling, world-creating demiurge of cinema, he comes across as altogether affable and down to earth. He tells me how happy he was to shoot



PACK UP YOUR TROUBLES
A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence follows Jonathan and Sam, a pair of down-at-heel salesmen of jokes and novelties (above). The series of vignettes (right) was shot in Andersson's Studio 24 in Stockholm, a self-contained universe in which everything is controlled and manifestly artificial





COMIC TOUCH
Roy Andersson (right) drew his own storyboard images for *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (above and below), including the shocking image of African slaves being driven into a giant brass drum (bottom right)



digitally for the first time on *A Pigeon...*, using a Red camera. "For me it's a release. Now it's fantastic to get deep focus, it's so much better," he says; his films are famous for their elaborate, cavernous deep focus tableaux, which, just like the Jacques Tati films Andersson so admires, keep the viewer constantly busy scanning every corner of the screen.

Andersson famously recruits non-professional actors in all shapes and sizes. I ask whether he writes his characters specifically for the people he finds. "It's a mixture. I have an idea about a person who should be so-and-so, and say so-and-so, and I'll try to find him with my assistants – among the actors in Sweden, or in the street, at restaurants, bars, gas stations and so on. When I find possible people, I'll try the dialogue with them, before the dialogue is totally finished."

Andersson's fascination with the oddity of the human form takes its cue from his favourite painters of the German *Neue Sachlichkeit* school, notably George Grosz and Otto Dix. But there's a difference between painting and filmmaking. It's one thing to invent grotesque figures on a canvas, but if you take real people and accentuate their oddness on screen, are you turning them into monsters for the viewer's amusement?

"Exploiting them? That's a very good question. I hope I have empathy for the people I use. Yes, I have. I'm not a cynic. Fellini inspired me a lot – especially *Roma*, *Amarcord* and *E la nave va* [*And the Ship Sails on*]. His films are realistic, but a little more than that, and that's what I also hope to develop."

Andersson's humour indeed comes across as uncynical, and the running joke in *A Pigeon...* about the gag salesmen suggests that the director has little interest in the broader, more mechanical forms of screen humour. "I have a rather special taste in comedy," he admits. "When I started my career I was so inspired by the Czech filmmakers, especially Milos Forman and Jirí Menzel. They had this very special 'common life' humour – not drastic, but very calm. I used it in my first, very realistic movie – but later I exaggerated it, cleansed and condensed it, with the help of painting, with the help of Fellini, and with my own curiosity."

A particularly tender comic sequence in *A Pigeon...* represents the film's fifth episode of possible happiness on earth. The scene is set in a basement bar in 1943, where the hostess greets a queue of eager servicemen, kissing them one by one. The establishment's theme song – 'Limping Lotta's Bar in Gothenburg', to the tune of 'John Brown's Body' – is chanted in heavenly harmony by the assembled company as the seductive Lotta swoons in the arms of her admirers. "It's a very beautiful song, almost forgotten now," Andersson says. "But I sang it with my friends when I was a child in Gothenburg – I was born in 1943. 'Ten shillings for a shot', but I increased it to 50. The real Lotta owned a bar and it was very popular in the 40s."

But the predominant tone of *A Pigeon...* is considerably darker. Andersson is a specialist in apocalyptic set pieces: in *Songs from the Second Floor*, an army of the dead rise up from a field, while *You, the Living* ends with the ominous advance of a squadron of bombers. *A Pigeon...* culminates in a singularly shocking nightmare image: African slaves driven by European soldiers into a giant brass drum, which is then heated to produce musical sounds as the captives scream in torment.

"That," says Andersson, "is a scene I've had in my head for 40 years. When I was a student, I had a job as a teacher, and I was obliged to teach Christianity – I had no special interest in it, I'm an atheist. However, I had to go to the library to prepare the lessons and I read about the Assyrians, hundreds of years before Christ. They were very cruel to the defeated enemy: they tortured them on stage to amuse the public, and constructed a machine that could change sounds of suffering into music. Of course, it's a metaphor of how we behave in our time also – we exploit what we can to have good times for ourselves, and forget how other people suffer."

The centrepiece of *A Pigeon...* is something new in the trilogy – a farcical and somewhat eerie incursion of the past into the present. The setting is a cavernous bar looking out on an industrial wasteland; as an endless parade of horses passes by outside, the bar is commandeered by a detachment of 18th-century Swedish cavalry, headed by King Charles XII, off to fight the Russian army (and to get roundly trounced). Lasting approximately 11 minutes in a single fixed-camera sequence shot, this scene is a magnificent example of Andersson's ability to choreograph a form of spectacle that is at once wildly *outré* and utterly, coldly logical in the manner of dream.

Charles XII, Andersson explains, "is a symbol for Sweden, of that time when we even had Finland and the Baltic states, and we lost it because of him – and that was good that we lost it. But he's also a symbol for masochism as a warrior – and also a symbol for fascists, who celebrate the anniversary of his death."


The scene's priceless deflation of national *folie de grandeur* was shot in a huge empty porcelain factory, which Andersson rented for two months. "As an average, I shoot every scene around 30 or 40 times, but this scene I managed to get in four takes, as the owner of the first horse didn't permit us to do more than four. I think it was the second take – it was a miracle, almost." The scene's dizzy use of anachronism is something new for Andersson. "I

didn't dare do that before, but I think I'll go further with that mixture of realism, fantasy, absurdism."

It's possible that Andersson may one day explore this mixture in a project he has planned for years, an adaptation of Louis-Ferdinand Céline's hyper-pessimistic anti-*Bildungsroman*, *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932). Andersson has the blessing of French publisher Gallimard, but finance remains the problem, because US money would preclude doing it in French, as he'd prefer. "Céline's temperament is formulated very uniquely – when he describes breathing, he says, 'You don't inhale, you *blow air out*.' That kind of drastic formulation I really like." The film, if it happens, will combine Andersson's style with that of Tardi, the French *bande dessinée* artist who has illustrated the novel.

"It could be a fantastic movie," Andersson says of a story that starts in the trenches of Flanders, before moving to Africa and then to the car factories of Detroit. "Wow, to get that budget... Because if you do that movie, it's your duty to do it with good finance, otherwise you will misuse this fantastic novel."

Meanwhile, Andersson has another project already lined up. "I want to call the next production the fourth part of the trilogy," he laughs, then adds, "It will be very separate." But there won't be another radical change in style like the one between *Giliap* and *Songs from the Second Floor*. "I found the style I use now after many years' hard work, and if you've found something, it's hard to leave it before you find something better. If I don't find any reason to change my style I will keep it, but nuance it – I will make the next movie a little bit lighter, more positive and optimistic."

"It has to come out very naturally – but I really will increase these optimistic beautiful moments in our existence." 

 **A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence** is released in UK cinemas on 24 April and is reviewed on page 86

The Czech filmmakers had this very special 'common life' humour – I exaggerated it and condensed it, with the help of painting, with the help of Fellini, and with my own curiosity



PHOTOGRAPH BY OSCAR FERNANDEZ LORENCO



ONCE WERE WARRIORS

Where a previous generation of avant-garde directors in the 50s and early 60s had made works that still sought to serve a general audience in the cinema, radical independent filmmakers in the UK in the 1970s were at virtual war with the mainstream, exploring entirely new methods and modes of address

By William Fowler

WONDER WOMEN
 Laura Mulvey and
 Peter Wollen's 1974 film
*Penthesilea: Queen of the
 Amazons* (above) traverses
 thousands of years to look at
 the image of the Amazonian
 woman in myth

'This machine kills fascists' was the famous phrase written on protest singer Woody Guthrie's acoustic guitar. By 1968 it could be glimpsed on portable 16mm cameras surveying the protest carnage outside the US embassy in London's Grosvenor Square at the height of the Vietnam War. As police charged the protesters on 17 March, the lightweight machines rolled, documenting the violence.

Revolution was in the air, not only politically but also technically. New cameras enabled sound and picture to be shot in synch and the latest stocks made possible the shooting of images in low light. These developments had been spearheaded by television but independent filmmakers of the 1970s used the same tools, documenting events and experimenting with the medium, providing counter-narratives to those of the mainstream. They sought out the cracks in the system of how films were made and delivered while at the same time engaging in and contributing to the social changes of their age: feminism, workers' rights and gay liberation.

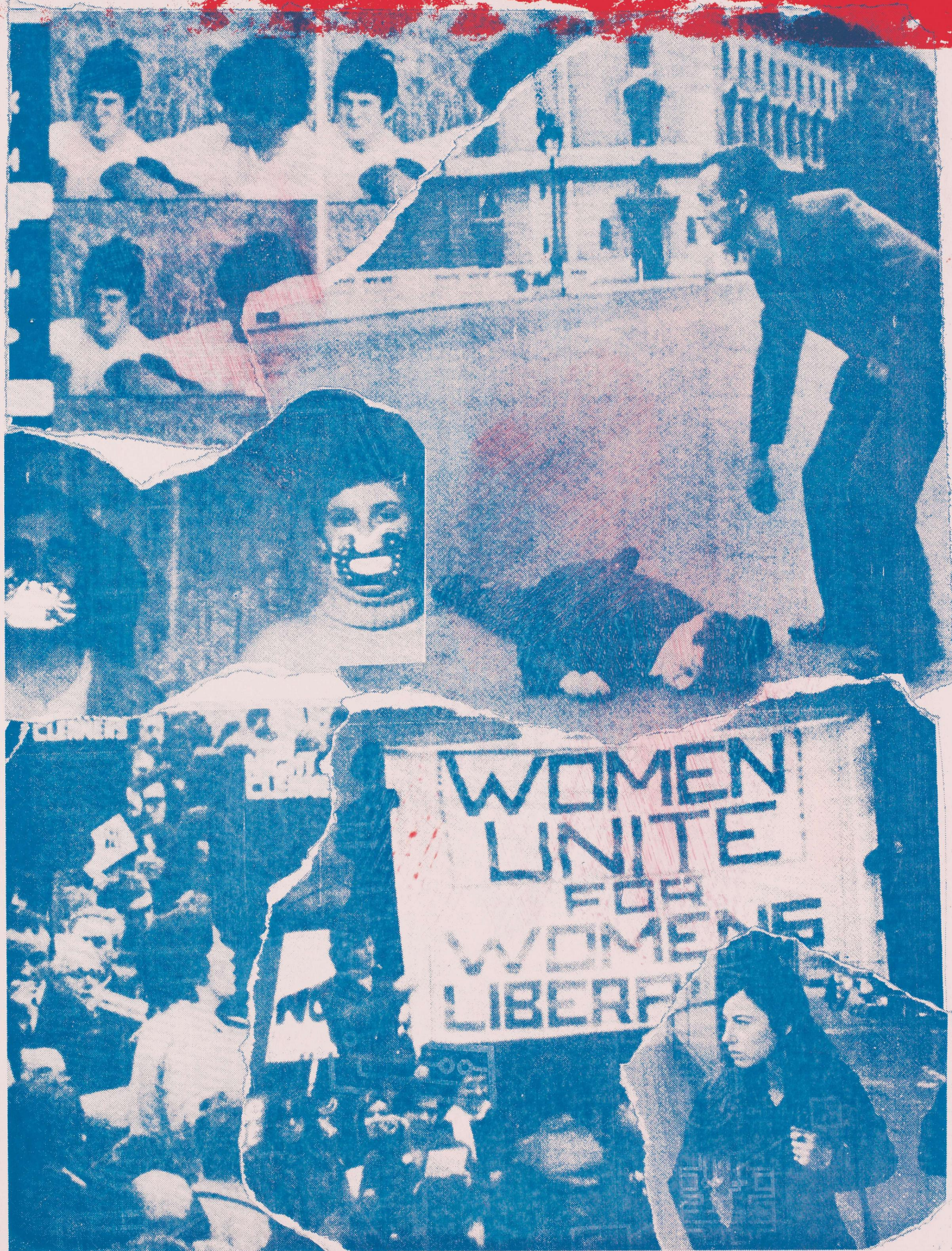
Cinema Action, for instance, was a film collective whose members rejected the idea of the single auteur. Instead they explored filmmaking as a non-hierarchical activity, centred on the class struggle. Ann Guedes founded the group after she returned from Paris at the end of the 60s and began screening films of the events of May '68 in the French capital before moving into production, reporting on subjects that directly affected working-class life in the UK. Cinema Action films were screened at union meetings and most of the collective came from working-class backgrounds. *Fighting the Bill* (1970) and *The Miners' Film* (1975) reported on the Industrial Relations Bill, which attempted to break union power, and the consequent 1974 miners' strike.

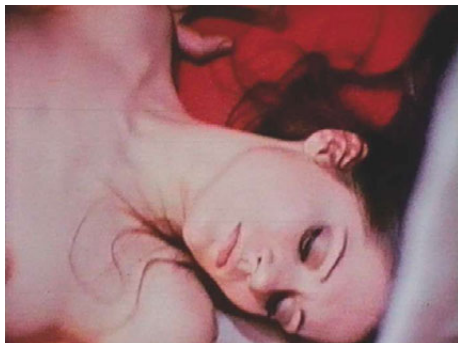
Squatters (1970) documented the Greater London Council's lack of investment in housing and attacked its attempts to raise rents. Shot in stark black and white, and incorporating basic title overlays – notably a hovering question mark – the film is urgent and leading in tone. London appears run-down, the buildings ready to crumble, almost as they looked in the Free Cinema documentaries of the 1950s. Unlike Lindsay Anderson and his friends, however, Cinema Action filmmakers were concerned with immediate change, with working-class voices driving the narrative, including housing tenants and squatters speaking about the council's use of illegal bailiffs.

Independent filmmaking in the 70s could be bold and oppositional but it was not always clearly left wing. Denys Irving's *Exit* (1971), for instance, is a sparse, brooding trip of a picture, more in line with darker aspects of the early 70s rock scene than with film culture. Irving himself features on screen, speeding the highways on his motorbike, all long hair, leather and velvet. It's a hypnotic, sinister experience, his harsh electronic music propelling the film as much as the relentless driving and psychedelic treatments of the capital at night. The drama – and more experimentation – comes when he introduces a 16mm camera, both on screen and as a self-reflexive element. He adjusts it and plays with it before taking to the road again. And then, when he pushes an unnamed woman from his speeding bike and drives off, the drama ramps up a gear. It's dark and very English, like a drastic reimagining of the fake *cinéma vérité* movie *David Holzman's Diary* (1967).

Filmmakers who came of age in the 1960s took a different approach to those of the previous generation. While the likes of Chris Marker and Alain Resnais made penetrating, incisive films about post-war culture and the legacy of history and art in France, they did so with the intention of reaching a general audience.

ILLUSTRATION BY KATE GIBB





CULTURE WARS
(Above, from left)
Stephen Dwoskin's woozy,
hallucinogenic *Times For*
(1970), Berwick Street Film
Collective's *Nightcleaners*
(1975) and Ken McMullen's
Resistance (1976)

➡ Their films were innovative and reflective but had a directness of address that made them immediately readable. By contrast, the 1970s independents were at virtual war with the mainstream, exploring entirely new methods and modes of address.

For many it was not enough for a film to deliver a political message; rather, a work should interrogate its own means and conditions of existence. Film brought with it assumptions about realism and a neutrality of intent, and yet it was a created, creative technology, born of and written into a much broader socioeconomic system. If the problematic social realities of 1970s Britain were to be explored and rewritten, then surely the means by which this reality was recreated on screen had also to be interrogated and reconceived.

The London Filmmakers' Co-operative was a particular locus of this approach. Aside from producing actual film stock, the co-op provided a parallel system to the traditional production and cinema circuit. It had equipment, a cinema and distribution library, and anyone could submit a film and join. Films produced there could be highly formal in the avant-garde tradition and yet go beyond merely highlighting the artificiality of the image or the flatness of the screen. Works often played on how figurative meaning and recognition was created at the moment of projection and reception. Lis Rhodes's *Light Reading* (1979), for instance, is constructed like a riddle. It tells the fragmented story of a woman describing her self-awareness and awareness of being looked at. The voiceover takes on unexpected relationships with the film's manipulated images of photographs, film strips and text, and linear meanings come and go. Like *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974) and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) by Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, it explores the visual representation and perception of women on screen and in patriarchy while resisting the realist tradition.

There was, of course, always a risk that such radical, oppositional independent films would only find a small audience – which is ironic, given their call to create widespread change. Exposure varied, but campaign and social-issue films often broke out of their ghetto. By appealing to a general female audience, for instance, distributor Cinema of Women secured significant bookings on international titles *The Power of Men* (1978) and *A Question of Silence* (1981).

How radical works might fair in the world was faced head-on, if mischievously, by *Skinflicker* (1972). This decidedly provocative title (directed by Tony Bicat, written by playwright Howard Brenton) presents three dissidents who plan to commit a revolutionary act on film – the very film we're watching. They kidnap a government

minister, leaving his wife and son unconscious or possibly dead, and then threaten their prisoner with extreme violence while reading out prepared indictments of the society he represents. It's a fake home movie, of course, but one since reclaimed by the government for anti-terrorist training; a found, found object. *Skinflicker* prefigures the conceit of *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) yet evokes the hard, relentless trajectory of a film by Lars von Trier.

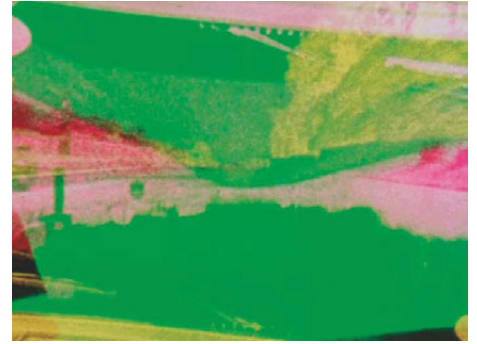
Remarkably *Skinflicker* was financed by the BFI Production Board. The Board had received a significant boost in funding in 1972, and that year its head Mamoun Hassan invited Malcolm Le Grice, a prominent figure at the Co-op, to sit on the committee. In 1974, Hassan's successor Barrie Gavin was eager to further acknowledge the radical end of UK independent film and supported Cinema Action, the Berwick Street Film Collective and the London Women's Film Group. By the time Peter Sainsbury, who had a background with alternative exhibitor and distributor The Other Cinema, took over 14 months later, links between the BFI and the independent sector had reached their zenith.

ONE STEP BEYOND

Although independent filmmakers were invariably wary and critical of the BFI, representing as it did the establishment, there was no doubting the institute's desire to support cultural and non-commercial film. In a 1976 BFI pamphlet, Sainsbury expressed a desire to use production funding not solely to finish films but also to help increase knowledge about the *meaning* of film, to affect the way audiences saw and understood cinema. His aspirations reflected the view that filmmaking was a discursive activity, intended to generate something beyond the existence of the works themselves. The overtly political titles belonged to an ongoing struggle: spreading information, galvanising interest but also intervening in the process of how political action was framed and understood. In other cases the viewer was confronted and implicated in the construction of a film's meaning. The London Women's Film Group wanted not only to contribute to the feminist movement but also to provide opportunities for women to gain filmmaking experience.

It was a whole culture. Festivals explored the lines where the different approaches started and stopped. Magazines such as *Afterimage*, *Screen*, *Cinemantics* and *Cinema Rising* gave space to fierce debate and self-reflection. Theorising the changing times, Peter Wollen identified two sides to the movement: a political avant-garde and an aesthetic avant-garde. His article in *Studio International* informed thinking around the Independent Filmmakers' Association, a significant pressure group that influenced

It was easy to shoot on the streets of a metropolis in decay. In many ways filmmakers were exploring the last gasp of what we call public space. It's a different city now



the early days of Channel 4. There were, however, many works that fell between the stools of Wollen's taxonomy: not least Irving's *Exit* and Barry Salt's self-explanatory *Six Reels of Film to Be Shown in Any Order* (1971).

The concerns of the age have been discussed here using the past tense but many issues still hold true. Film is still part of a larger socioeconomic system, reproducing dominant codes and ideologies, particularly with digital filmmaking, wherein certain brands and methods dominate. The way we interact with moving images is more complex than ever and the politics are arguably harder to untangle. Yet we cannot escape the fact that 'film' still reproduces the problems of our current reality.

Taking the works discussed here out of context, one can see recurring images and themes that run separate to any immediate political or aesthetic concern. Roads and city streets keep being returned to; cars driving, the camera facing forward, looking to the distant horizon. London features as a recurring reference point, its streets downtrodden and grey, a location of drama, struggle and the unpredictable. The capital's population actually went into heavy decline from the 60s right through to the early 90s. Squatting increased, going from 10,000 squatters in 1973 to 30,000 by 1975. As documented in William Raban's 72-82 (2014), artists and filmmakers joined the throng, occupying buildings, making work. It was easy to shoot on the streets of a metropolis in decay, but this is also instructive. There were no permits to be paid for, no forms to be filled in. In many ways filmmakers were exploring the last gasp of what we call public space. It's a different city now.

Recently we have seen the publication of key books on the phenomenon, including *Working Together: Notes on British Film Collectives in the 1970s* and, hot off the press, *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity*. There have also been gallery shows about the period and old works made newly available. This resurgence of interest suggests a desire to reconnect with past methods: collective production, working with communities, direct engagement with politics, the use of film as an agent for change. It's also part of a realisation that works do not always deserve a difficult reputation. *Nightcleaners* (1975), about the campaign to unionise women who cleaned office blocks at night, included black spacing and optical printing effects, thereby combining Wollen's political and aesthetic avant gardes. Made by the Berwick Street Film Collective, it was met with incredulity in some circles, but at screenings workers and union members were at ease with its formal experiments.

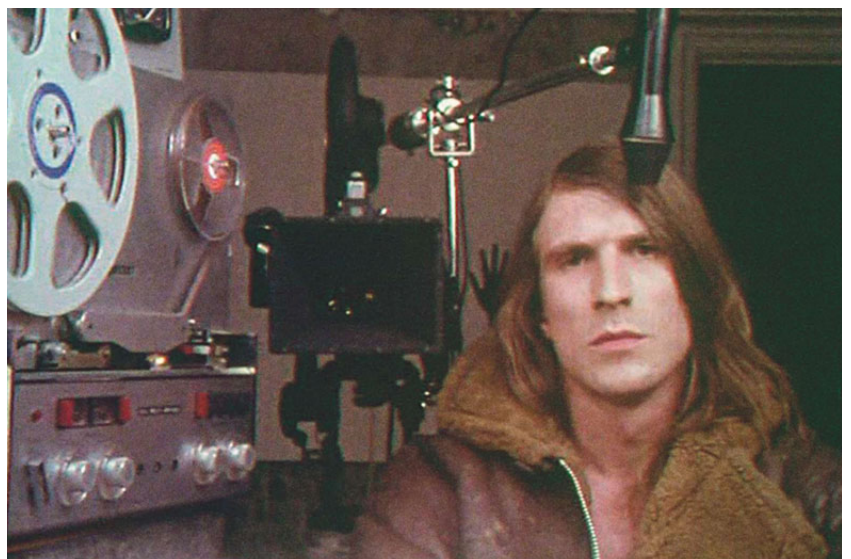
But where are such films to be seen today? If film is a battleground (as Godard, through Sam Fuller, would

have it), how do you outline the space of engagement and conflict in the age of the internet and the gallery? As an architectural space the cinema may represent for some the politics of the lecture theatre: a top-down, semi-dictatorial mode of imparting ideology. But it has other qualities, attendance becoming the rare moment when people actually gather together, sharing an equivalent experience at the same time. It's this context of sharing that allows experimentation and the very concept of an avant garde to take its disruptive effect. It's this spirit that feeds current interest in UK independent film of the 1970s.

Pursuing a metaphor around cinema and church, Marc Karlin of the Berwick Street Collective observed in 1980, "Cinema is an area where, if you like, certain sacraments happen. You can have agnostics, atheists, believers, but all of them using that time out, that one and a half hours, that specific area for all kinds of combat. It's odd that after a film you can travel home in the Tube with people you don't know who have been to the cinema and you know that you are all more or less retracing, reworking a film – certain things are being renewed, certain things are being re-understood, renegotiated, and then it's forgotten until the next sacrament." ☺



See page 52 for our Wide Angle feature on Marc Karlin. A season of films 'Cinema born again: radical film from the 1970s' is screening at the BFI Southbank, London, from April 10-24. 'Film as an ideological weapon: Cinema Action' screens at the venue on 23 June. *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity*, by Patti Gaal-Holmes, is published by Palgrave



REVOLUTIONARY ACTS
(Above, from left) *Skinflicker* (1972), *Rapunzel, Let Down Your Hair* (1978) and *Solar Flares Burn for You* (1973); and (below) Denys Irving's sparse, brooding trip of a film *Exit* (1971)



BASIC INSTINCT

A split-second decision in the face of an advancing avalanche proves a critical test of character in Ruben Ostlund's chilly, provocative drama 'Force majeure', which explores the cracks that lie beneath the surface in a seemingly happy family on a skiing holiday in the Alps

By Nick Roddick

When it comes to clichés, 'enfant terrible' is right up there with 'quirky' as a handy label to stick on any filmmaker who doesn't quite fit the familiar categories. For Scandinavian filmmakers, the odds increase sharply. A quick Google reveals upwards of 30 recent instances of Ruben Ostlund being described as an *enfant terrible*, much as fellow Swede Lukas Moodysson was before him.

No question that both directors like to throw their audiences off balance with disturbing or confrontational scenes, though Ostlund's are more weirdly troubling than violent. The scene in *Play* (2011) in which young Sebastian, pushed to breaking point by the boys who have stolen his phone, silently climbs to the top of a tree is a case in point: uncomfortable to watch, not just because of the evident danger involved, but because of the neutral way Ostlund's immobile camera observes him. Equally typical is his tendency to insert a comic moment into an intense scene, like the remote-controlled toy that disrupts the father's humiliation in *Force majeure*, or the moment the bus driver in the same film, trying to hit the door release, switches on the windscreen wipers instead.

But the *enfant terrible* label is a bad fit for Ostlund: for starters, he is 41 (just five years younger than Moodysson, though they can seem a generation apart); most of all, though, there is a steely discipline in the way he plans, frames and orchestrates his films. Sometimes he does so with such skill and elegance that one overlooks – or at

any rate forgives – the slenderness of the subject matter.

I first met Ostlund in 2006 when he brought the project that would become *Involuntary* (2008) to the Netherlands Production Platform, an annual pitching session in Utrecht. I had already watched his eight-minute short *Autobiographical Scene Number 6882* (2005), which I thought – and still think – one of the best short films I have ever seen: focused, elegant and, yes, disturbing. In a style already fully developed – long shots from a fixed camera – Ostlund observes some teenage horseplay on a road bridge high above a river, which ends with one boy tombstoning into the water. The cool distance the camera keeps is common to all his films, and yet characters clearly emerge. Plus there is plenty of dialogue: people talk a lot in Ostlund's films, often at the same time, as though compensating for the fixedness of the frame.

Autobiographical Scene exemplifies the director's early filmmaking style, standing back but watching and listening closely, and forcing us to do the same. The clearest example of the technique can be seen in his short *Incident by a Bank* (2009), in which people and actions – eventually culminating in a bungled bank robbery – come into and go out of the fixed frame, which shows the same stretch of street frontage throughout.

The director began his career making snowboarding videos, and those years (1995-98) on the piste enabled him to develop a strong command of the medium before

Spoiler alert: this feature reveals a plot twist



being subjected to the orthodoxies of film school (which he attended from 1998-2001). If nothing else, they gave him the confidence to stick to his guns, even if doing so means not getting a Competition slot at Cannes, as discussed below.

His micro-budget first feature, *The Guitar Mongoloid* (2004), is like a dry run for *Involuntary*: a stationary camera captures a rough-and-ready series of disconnected scenes featuring odd behaviour which are linked by a kid in a red jacket tunelessly busking while a gang of teenagers trash bicycles. But *Involuntary* is something else again: there is nothing rough and ready about the film or the way it came into being. By the time they reached Utrecht, one of many staging posts on the European pitching circuit, Ostlund and his producing partner Erik Hemmendorff had almost half their budget in place, a detailed shooting schedule, and one of the film's scenes already in the can (the one in which Lars has a drunken encounter with the pole of a Swedish flag – a scene no one who has seen the film is likely to forget). The film premiered – with careful guidance from sales agent Philippe Bober, who was by then on board as associate producer – 18 months later in *Un Certain Regard* in Cannes in May 2008.

In his Utrecht pitch, Ostlund mentioned venerable video game *SimCity*, in which a single click can unleash a series of catastrophes on the virtual population. There is likewise something Olympian (though not quite so cataclysmic) about *Involuntary*. In those trademark long takes from a fixed camera, we observe five stories in which carrying on as if nothing has happened has serious (and possibly fatal) consequences. As in all the director's films, sticking to habitual behaviour when circumstances change – what the philosopher Henri Bergson once called the essence of comedy – puts characters in a position from which (like Sebastian up the tree in *Play* or the father, Tomas, after the avalanche in *Force majeure*) retreat is difficult, if not impossible. But while getting there may be comic, the consequences usually aren't.

The film's Swedish title, *De ofrivilliga*, of which 'in-

voluntary' is a perfectly accurate translation, can also mean 'unintentional', or 'not done on purpose'. Each of the film's five main protagonists reacts to something in a way they didn't mean to, but whose repercussions they fail adequately to deal with. That is also a recurring theme in the less successful *Play*, in which passengers on a tram (a favourite Ostlund location) fail to deal with an instance of bullying. But when, the next day, one of the victims' fathers does intervene, all the hitherto suppressed racism of the film (the bullies are black, the victims white) comes bubbling to the surface and the result is even worse. Everyone is trapped: we're back in *SimCity*.

In terms of progression, Ostlund's career hit a few pot-holes after *Involuntary*. *Play* screened in the Directors' Fortnight in Cannes after being denied a Competition slot. And although *Force majeure* – which traces the bitter fallout between a man and his family after he shows his true colours by panicking in the face of an avalanche – shows all the signs of being an arthouse hit, it was also denied a Competition slot in Cannes last year. Rumours – and well-sourced rumours at that – suggest it would have been accepted if Ostlund had agreed to trim a scene in which Tomas weeps uncontrollably, first on the landing of the luxury hotel, then in the room, where he collapses sobbing as his children try to console him. ➡

NO WAY OUT

In all of Ruben Ostlund's films – including *Force majeure* (above and left) and *Involuntary* (below) – he places his characters in situations from which they find it difficult, if not impossible, to retreat



➡ The avalanche – which looks lethal but proves harmless – changes everything. Before it, Tomas, his wife Ebba and kids Vera and Harry seem the perfect family: good-looking, sporty, multilingual and coolly confident, if a little passionless. This impression was all part of the plan behind the film: when he cast the two lead roles, Ostlund confesses to me the day after its Cannes premiere, he already had the festival in mind. “We were looking for people who could walk on the red carpet,” he says. But *Un Certain Regard* – where *Force majeure* again ended up – doesn’t really have a red carpet. Did he mind? “Of course, yeah, we were disappointed.”

And did he think the crying scene was the reason? “I definitely think it was,” he says. “But if I had taken that out I would have regretted it later on, because I know that that scene forces people to look at the film in a different way. It would be a much easier film to watch without it – less disturbing. And I wanted it to be disturbing.”

Shot in the French ski resort of Les Arcs, *Force majeure* was originally planned, like *Involuntary*, as a series of thematically linked stories, with the title *Tourist*. “In the beginning,” says Ostlund, “it was like multiple stories – different situations with tourists. But then a friend of mine said, ‘What about if the father in the family runs away and leaves his wife and kids [when he sees the avalanche]?’ And I thought, ‘OK, now we have a film.’”

In terms of structure, *Force majeure* – which takes place over a five-day skiing holiday – is bookended by two set pieces: the avalanche that triggers the relationship crisis; and the nightmarish trip back down a winding mountain road to the airport with a bus driver who seems to be in less than perfect control of his vehicle. Both are spectacular; one is faked, the other isn’t.

“The actual avalanche was real and shot in British Columbia,” explains Ostlund. “It’s a controlled avalanche, which they do in BC. That was combined with a green screen and build-up in the studio, and then there was snow smoke on set and a lot of digital work afterwards.” But the road was real. “We were Googling ‘Worst roads in the world’ and that is one that came up. It’s in northern Italy. It was very stressful to be on it: we were a whole week going up and down, but we shot it all in the bus.”

Serving as more than just set pieces, the two events test the characters, with Tomas failing the first challenge by running away, while his friend Mats (played by Kristofer Hivju from *Game of Thrones*) does the expected “Everybody calm down! Women and children first” speech while evacuating the bus. It’s a surprisingly slender premise for a film, a fact partially obscured by directorial bravura, but it is based on extensive research. “Women and children first” is a myth,” says Ostlund. “We love to tell stories about heroes, but the fact is, the ones who survive haven’t been heroes: they’ve trampled over people...”

When the Baltic ferry MS Estonia sank in 1994 with the loss of 852 lives, for example, more men made it out alive (22 per cent of the original passengers) than women (just 5 per cent), with the crew almost twice as likely to survive. Even the detail of Tomas snatching up his iPhone rather than his children when confronted with the avalanche is borrowed from a story Ostlund found in a newspaper. “There was a party [given by] a couple who had a pool at the house,” he recalls. “Their three-year-old fell in and couldn’t swim. The father was standing there and the mother was shouting, ‘Get into the pool! What



When you are scared of dying and the survival instinct is turned on, no one actually knows how we will act

are you doing?” And he said, ‘But my iPhone is in my pocket...’” Do we laugh at or revile such human weakness? As Tomas says in the film, nobody died, but...

Stylistically, *Force majeure* still has its share of static shots and long takes, but Ostlund seems to have made his peace with more traditional devices like panning, tracking, reframing and shot/reverse shot. Where the formal austerity does remain is in the depiction of Les Arcs. “I’d been looking to do a film there because I wanted to use that environment to highlight the absurdity of the ski resort,” he says. “When I was in that world, I really enjoyed it – the thrill of being in the mountains. But when you get back down, you see all those neon colours and mirrored glasses and ski boots... The gear looks like science fiction.”

In the end, though, *Force majeure* stands or falls on the strength of the emotional drama that plays out against this artificially tamed landscape: the kids terrified their parents will divorce, Tomas hating the person he discovers himself to be, Ebba equally unable to process the discovery. In the film, for the first time, Ostlund uses close-ups, challenging us (and himself) to read the emotions in – or into – a face. He does something similar in the closing scene of *Involuntary* when the camera captures a medium shot of Eva the schoolteacher as her fellow staff members – who are out of shot – talk across her until she finally demands to be included. But the balance between concept and emotion has certainly shifted from the earlier films, even if the emotions are still held at a distance.

“When you are scared of dying and the survival instinct is turned on,” insists Ostlund, “no one actually knows how we will act.”

So do Tomas and Ebba divorce?

“I don’t know,” he says. “But someone told me that relationships with passion, they end, while relationships that are cold can last for a lifetime.”

A bleak epitaph for a chilly film, but one that showcases the increasingly confident work of a filmmaker to watch. 📌

i *Force majeure* is released in UK cinemas on 10 April and is reviewed on page 78

GOING OFF PISTE
Ruben Ostlund (above) cut his teeth making snowboarding videos, a background which enabled him to develop a command of the medium before being subjected to the orthodoxies of film school, and which has left him with the confidence to stick to his guns in the face of outside pressure

Congratulations to Michael Cowan

for the 2015 Katherine Singer Kovács Award for Best Essay Published in a Journal, for the essay "Absolute Advertising: Walter Ruttmann and the Weimar Advertising Film", *Cinema Journal* 52.4 (2013), 49-73.

Over the last three years, members of the **Department of Film Studies at The University of St Andrews** have been honored three times with SCMS awards.

Brian Jacobson was awarded the 2013 SCMS Dissertation Award for *Studios Before the System: Architecture, Technology, and Early Cinema*.

Joshua Yumibe received Honorable Mention for the SCMS First Book Award in 2013 for *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (Rutgers University Press, 2012).

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SOUTHERN GOTHIC

The Gothic tradition in the American South, exemplified in literature in the work of Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor and William Faulkner, has long provided a rich seam of content for cinema. Finding their spark in what Tennessee Williams called 'an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience' and set amid the decaying grandeur and crumbling mansions of the antebellum South, these films are haunted by the ghosts of slavery, lost loves and dark family secrets, and feature exiles and eccentrics in a world characterised by macabre violence. By **Nick Pinkerton**



Some years ago, while standing around a living room in Sumner, Mississippi, I picked up an old copy of the *Oxford American* magazine, whose cover posed the question: 'Is the South Still Gothic?'

The residence I was standing in, as it happens, had been the boyhood home of the Memphis-based photographer William Eggleston, whose subject matter is largely quotidian, though he occasionally veers into terrain that might be described as Gothic. You can see the dining room and sitting room of this house in a number of Eggleston's photographs from the 1960s and 70s. In those days these rooms were painted an alarming shade of green, though by the time I saw the house, decorated in the height of good taste, that bilious green had been painted over, save for a small corner where one wall met the ceiling, left as a reminder. Sumner is one of the seats of Tallahatchie County, one county over from Lafayette, where William Faulkner was raised in Oxford and whence he took the inspiration for his fictional Yoknapatawpha County – Eggleston's photographs of the area are collected in a volume titled *Faulkner's Mississippi*. Tallahatchie County is named for the river of the same name that runs through it, which achieved a measure of fame in 1955 when the mutilated body of 14-year-old Emmett Till was recovered from its waters some 40 miles downriver from Sumner. Eggleston's grandfather was the judge on the trial. Till, it would be revealed, had been dumped there after being savagely murdered for having the temerity to speak to a married white woman. This, too, remains as a reminder.

I am, I should say at the outset, not a Southerner but a native of Cincinnati, a city in south-west Ohio separated only by a river from Kentucky – a slave state that didn't secede from the Union, like Maryland, but Dixie nevertheless. The river is the Ohio, which features in Charles Laughton's 1955 *The Night of the Hunter*, often cited as a Southern Gothic classic, though it would

more accurately be classified as Appalachian Gothic. I was raised in the North, then, but in walking distance from the South. I don't know if this has given me any especial perspective on either, but I will attempt to do justice to both.

The American South has certainly enjoyed its share of romanticisation and idealisation – you can find Northern men of letters, such as Henry Miller (in 1945's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*) and Edmund Wilson (in 1962's *Patriotic Gore*), playing with the myth of the noble Southern 'Lost Cause' as a repudiation of the industrialisation that followed the Union victory. More generally, however, it has in popular culture performed the admirable function of acting as a scapegoat for the North, a means to reassure the Yankee of his own civilisation by allowing him to hold himself above his Southern cousins, forgoing addressing the prejudices of his own country by externalising and projecting them on to a convenient Other. (The United States serves this

The persistent image of the South is as the cradle of what Greil Marcus famously dubbed the 'Old, Weird America'



Robert Mitchum in *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

function for a great many other nations, while itself preferring to use Russia for these purposes.)

The persistent image of the South, as perpetuated in innumerable works by native sons and daughters, as well as by the carpetbaggers who flocked from the North in search of easy profits at the close of the Civil War, is as the cradle of what Greil Marcus famously dubbed the 'Old, Weird America'. Still defined by its resistance to the meddling of the federal government – the subject of Elia Kazan's ravishing *Wild River* (1960), shot in the Tennessee Valley – the South is frequently depicted as a land of independent fiefdoms in which the highest law is the local gentry, installed since time immemorial in their colonnaded plantations, and the (usually corrupt, always sweatily obese) county sheriff, a character familiar from such drive-in hits as *White Lightning* (1973) and *Macon County Line* (1974), and television's *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979-85). *White Lightning* belongs to the moonshine movie subgenre, a celebration of the outlaw spirit as represented by distilling untaxed alcohol for sale and outrunning the Feds in souped-up cars – the storied origins of Nascar racing, by the way. The grandpappy of all moonshine movies is *Thunder Road* (1958) – a passion project for Robert Mitchum, who wrote the story, sang the theme song, and stars alongside his son James – which was shot in the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. (Mitchum, who also appeared in *The Night of the Hunter* and 1961's *Cape Fear*, is sometimes taken for a Southerner, and I suppose serving time for vagrancy on a Savannah, Georgia, chain gang in his youth gives him some honorary rights, though in fact he originates from nearer to the New England of 1973's *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*.) To clean these Augean stables of endemic corruption requires appropriately Herculean heroes, such as Joe Don Baker as renegade Sheriff Buford Pusser in Phil Karlson's *Walking Tall* (1973) or its direct precursor Karlson's *The Phenix City Story* (1955). The message is



Enemy at the gates: Clint Eastwood in Don Siegel's *The Beguiled* (1971), which was filmed in an ante-bellum plantation in Louisiana

clear: “Abandon hope, ye who cross the Mason-Dixon line.” At worst the outside interloper can anticipate a noose; at best, duelling banjos and an invitation to “Squeal like a pig!”

These stereotypes wouldn't persist without some undergirding of fact, and if you read up on, say, the State Line Mob or the Dixie Mafia of Biloxi, Mississippi, you'll find that they weren't to be done one better by their brethren in the north-east when it came to jaw-dropping violence – and we won't even start on the South's century of *de jure* disenfranchisement, enforced at gunpoint. This aside, it should be said that the southland is today, as ever, a region that a great many people of all races and creeds happily and proudly call home, a place of hospitality that borders on the pathological, where, even in this hectic era, the sweetness of life has not been altogether forgotten. It is home to some of the finest artery-hardening cooking in the United States, and one of the greatest, most fecund musical traditions in the world, if exportability is any measure of greatness. This side of the South – its *bon vivant* side – is seen to good advantage in the rollicking, Dionysian documentaries of Les Blank, who was born in Tampa, Florida, but discovered himself in the raucous party scene of 1950s New Orleans, a city to which he frequently returned. This is not, however, the South that we are concerned with here.

“I go home often, to refresh my sense of outrage,” the Columbus, Georgia-born novelist Carson McCullers once wrote. McCullers, who'd made a splashy debut with her 1940 novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, lit out for New York and Europe almost as soon as she'd cashed her first advance. This outrage, and the creeping darkness concomitant to it, is our subject. The South is old – Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was inspired by a shipwreck that occurred en route to the Virginia colony, known today by the nickname ‘Old Dominion’ – and its ties to the Gothic tradition go back as far as its literature: Edgar Allan Poe, to give one example, was a son of Richmond.

The specific designation ‘Southern Gothic’, however, is connected to a new social criticism and a flowering of the arts in the South that began in the early 20th century, in the years immediately following the 1917 publication of H.L. Mencken's essay ‘The Sahara of the Bozart’ (a hillbilly corruption of Beaux Arts). Mencken's sweeping and scathing essay diagnosed an utter dearth of culture in the former Confederate states, a claim repudiated almost as soon as it was made by the emergence of writers including James Branch Cabell, Thomas Wolfe, Katherine Anne Porter, McCullers and Tennessee Williams. This was a new Southern literature in stark contrast to the established tradition of ‘tall yarns’ or Joel Chandler Harris's dialect humour. Williams, authoring a spirited defence of McCullers's sophomore work, *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, which had been criticised for its excessive grotesquerie upon its 1941 publication, ventured to describe the local “Gothic school” to which he and McCullers had been consigned: “There is something in the region, something in the blood and culture of the southern state that has somehow made them the center of this Gothic school of writers.” Defining the



Murder in mind: Matthew McConaughey and Woody Harrelson in Nic Pizzolatto's *True Detective*

unifying attribute of work in this school, which he compared to the contemporary creations of the French existentialists, Williams singled out “a sense, an intuition, of an underlying dreadfulness in modern experience”, going on to praise McCullers's novel as “conceived in that Sense of the Awful which is the desperate black root of nearly all significant modern art, from the *Guernica* of Picasso to the cartoons of Charles Addams.”

As Williams reaffirms, the key figure in this renaissance of Southern literature – a renaissance roughly aligned to modernism – was Faulkner. Like most fêted authors of his day, Faulkner was courted by Hollywood straight away – his *Sanctuary*, infamous for addressing the taboo subject of rape, was filmed as 1933's *The Story of Temple Drake*, just nudged into theatres before the Production Code Administration (PCA) pulled down the shutters on all things illicit, simultaneously discouraging any depiction of “Miscegenation (sex relationships between the white and black races)” and “Willful offense to any nation, race or creed”. In practical terms, this meant a segregation of black and white subjects, and a denial, lest offence be given, that there was anything like a race issue in America.

Henceforth, if a film were to address the issue of lynch law – still taking lives both white and (disproportionately) black and, after 1930, doing so exclusively in the South – it would have to steer clear of the race issue, as in Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1936), which had consummate everyman Spencer Tracy as a victim of vigilantism. This PCA edict was challenged by a handful of postwar social problem films, a category to which Clarence Brown's 1949 adaptation of Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* firmly belongs. The film's

It is often said that the South's history is a presence in the current day – as Faulkner put it, ‘The past is never dead. It's not even past’

screenplay was written by Ben Maddow, who shortly thereafter would land on the Hollywood blacklist – another of the periodic retractions of freedom of speech that mark studio-era American movies – and it was not until the PCA and blacklist both began to lose their authority that the spectre of the rude ‘justice’ of the lynch mob, usually riled up by wrongful accusation, would return to the screen in such films as *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) and *The Chase* (1965). Texan Horton Foote wrote the screenplay for the first, while the second was based on Foote's 1956 play-become-novel of the same name.

It was yet another Southern playwright who, though unimpeachably innocent of commie affiliation, would most keep the guardians of cinematic morality on their toes through the Eisenhower years. This was Tennessee Williams, the son of a dilapidated Southern belle and a philandering salesman, for whom the family dysfunction, sexual repression and fabulous, galloping hysteria of his native land were so much biscuits and gravy. Along with the Kinsey Reports and the aural miscegenation represented by rock ‘n’ roll – an almost exclusively Southern phenomenon – Williams's work, particularly the ‘event’ films made from his plays, were vital tools in the dismantling of American propriety.

Of the change-averse South, it is often said that its history is a persistent presence in the current day – as Faulkner put it, “The past is never dead. It's not even past.” This must apply doubly to the defining event of the South's history, the Civil War – and though the marks of the war are found all over the American western, the ‘curious institution’ that necessitated that war, slavery, is curiously absent from Hollywood product. At midcentury, when the cinema was in its high sword-and-sandals stage, one could find significantly more references to Roman and Egyptian bondsmen than to the men and women who had served King Cotton. (See, for example, Howard Hawks's 1955 *Land of the Pharaohs*, co-scripted by Faulkner, who wrote dialogue for Jack Hawkins's Pharaoh Khufu in the orotund

voice of “a Kentucky colonel”.) The Pre-Code period was not much better – offhand, the most harrowing exception I can think of is the solemn depiction of slave boats trafficking Africans to America that opens D.W. Griffith’s *Abraham Lincoln* (1930). This was a glaring absence that would not be redressed until the 1970s, the decade of TV miniseries *Roots* (1977) and, love it or hate it, Richard Fleischer’s *Mandingo* (1975).

Newly permissible subject matter wasn’t the only change in filmed depictions of the South. Though a great many movies of the studio era were made from the writing of native-born Southerners, one and all of these were directed by outsiders – and most of them acted by them as well. In fact, aside from Griffith, whose father was Confederate officer ‘Roaring Jake’ Griffith, one can count on the fingers of a single hand the notable figures of studio-era Hollywood – that is to say, those who warrant an entry in Sarris’s *The American Cinema* in 1968 – born in the South. (For the record, these are Texan King Vidor, a survivor of the Galveston Hurricane of 1900; and Stanley Donen, whose family belonged to what can’t have been a particularly large Jewish community in Columbia, South Carolina.)

This dearth of Southern *auteurs* may be attributed to an inborn parochialism that prevented most natives of the region from straying as far as the next county, let alone Hollywood – here we may recall the famous story of Faulkner innocuously asking his boss at MGM, Louis B. Mayer, if he could “work from home”, and next being heard from 1,900 miles away, back in Oxford. It is also undoubtedly pertinent that, even 100 years after the devastation of the Civil War, the South was still far, far behind the rest of the country by any economic standard and, in this naturally backwards-



Luis Buñuel's *The Young One* (1960)

looking region, most of the creatively inclined natives dedicated themselves to 19th-century belletrist pursuits rather than the distinctly 20th-century business of moving pictures.

It was only with the death rattle of the studio system as classically constituted and the decentralisation of the American film industry, then, that indigenous entrepreneurial talents began to assert themselves, many working in the vein of so-called exploitation cinema, which preceded and predicted the regional independent filmmaking boom to come. Exploitation had deep roots in the South, with its freak show/medicine show traditions, and this produced such colourful figures as Texan schlockmeister Larry Buchanan and Alabama-born producer David F. Friedman, whose partnership with Herschell Gordon Lewis produced 1964 the South-will-rise-again splatterfest *Two Thousand Maniacs!* In the years to come, a bumper crop of native talents would appear to keep the local drive-ins serviced, including Charles B. Pierce of Texarkana (1972’s *The Legend of Boggy Creek*, 1976’s *The Town that Dreaded Sundown*), William Girdler of Louisville, Kentucky (*Abby*, 1974’s Blaxploitation answer to *The Exorcist*), and Austin’s Tobe Hooper,

whose independently produced *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) was a box-office success of heretofore unheard-of proportions. Hooper took his inspiration for *Massacre* from the case of Wisconsin’s Ed Gein, but shopped local for his follow-up crowd displeaser, *Eaten Alive* (aka *Death Trap*), which draws on the legend of Joe Ball, a folkloric figure who lived outside San Antonio in the 1930s and is believed to have murdered an untold number of women and fed their bodies to his pet alligators. (Returning to the question ‘Is the South still Gothic?’, a few years ago I visited an alligator farm in Collin County, Texas, where gators were raised for boots and accessories, and the drugged-up proprietor might very well have been Joe Ball reincarnate.)

All of this was many years before the words ‘South by Southwest’ or ‘Richard Linklater’ had entered the vernacular, though the table was already set for a groundswell of regionalised independent filmmaking, in the South as elsewhere in the States. Eagle Pennell, a friend of Hooper’s who watched and learned on the set of *Massacre*, shortly thereafter produced a shaggy-dog comedy called *The Whole Shootin’ Match* (1978) and, in the years to follow, there would be a decided uptick in the appearance of Southern stories told by honest-to-God Southerners, with actor-directors Robert Duvall and Billy Bob Thornton scoring conspicuous successes in the late 90s. Perhaps the defining figure of indigenous Southern cinema in the 21st century thus far has been Arkansas-born David Gordon Green, whose 2000 debut *George Washington* synthesised the influences of Texan/Oklahoman Terrence Malick, Los Angelean-by-way-of-Mississippi Charles Burnett and, yes, the eponymous Virginian. In films like Thornton’s *Sling Blade* (1996), Duvall’s *The Apostle* (1997), Green’s *Undertow* (2004) and *Joe* (2013), and Linklater’s *Bernie* (2011), as well as in Louisiana-born Nic Pizzolatto’s TV series *True Detective* (2014), the “underlying dreadfulness” described by Williams appears to be alive and unwell. Here, for good and ill, the words written by Hank Williams Jr in 1977 are apt: “The New South, thank God, is still the same.”

The 12 films below play in the ‘Southern Gothic: Love, death and religion in the American Deep South’ season at the BFI Southbank, London, throughout May. A video essay on the topic will appear at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound in April

1 *Intruder in the Dust* (Clarence Brown, 1949)

Lucas Beauchamp (Juano Hernández) is a proud, land-owning black farmer who refuses to bow and scrape before the whites in town, and when he’s accused of shooting a local peckerwood in the back, the mob that gathers outside the courthouse can’t wait to get their hands on him. In some areas the well-intentioned progressivism of *Intruder in the Dust* seems positively retrograde, and the script by Ben Maddow was criticised for its white saviour narrative by communist intellectual V.J. Jerome in his 1950 essay ‘The Negro in Hollywood Films’. Nevertheless *Intruder in the Dust*, much of which was filmed on location in Oxford, is remarkable for its evocation of the gay, festival atmosphere that often preceded a lynching, and for Hernández’s imperious screen presence.



I am a man: Juano Hernández as Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust* (1949)

2 *The Young One* (Luis Buñuel, 1960) Like *Intruder in the Dust* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Luis Buñuel's *The Young One* – which appeared the same year as Harper Lee's book, sometimes with the title *White Trash* – also hinges on an accused black man trying to keep out of a kangaroo court. A jazz clarinetist, Traver (Bernie Hamilton), washes up on an island hunting preserve off the Carolina coast after fleeing the city in a dinghy just ahead of cries of “Rape”. Here he runs afoul of a racist game warden (Zachary Scott) who's all the more leery of his visitor because he's courting the barely teenaged daughter (Key Meersman) of a newly deceased neighbour. In addressing a traditional Southern tendency to marry very young – which in the case of good ol' boy Jerry Lee Lewis, who'd tied the knot with his 13-year-old cousin, had recently shocked America – *The Young One* goes considerably further than Kubrick's *Lolita* would. This fact tends to overshadow another shocking aspect of the film – that it never sees fit to clear up the matter of whether or not Traver is actually guilty of the crime he's been accused of. While most movies about the South from this period were directed by men born outside it, few came from as far outside as Don Buñuel of Aragón, and this allowed him to transcend the binary between liberal piety and reactionary racism that tended to define issue-driven Hollywood movies. The men depicted by Hamilton and Scott are neither monsters nor paragons of pride and virtue, and in this there is something truly revolutionary.

3 *The Fugitive Kind* (Sidney Lumet, 1960) Marlon Brando defined the role of Stanley Kowalski in the 1947-49 stage run of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and his bull physique squeezed into a white T-shirt for Elia Kazan's 1951 film was perhaps the most iconic image of his screen career. This was not, precisely, to be eclipsed by the snakeskin jacket that he wears in his first and only ‘reunion’ with Williams in Sidney Lumet's *The Fugitive Kind*, an adaptation of Williams's 1957 *Orpheus Descending*. Brando plays Val Xavier – like Traver in *The Young One*, a musician on the run – who arrives in a small somnolescent town and acts as a force of erotic disruption, as Mr Presley and his ilk had done shortly before for the nation as a whole. It features standout work from Georgia native Joanne Woodward as slatternly dipso Carol Cutrer and, as a hate-sick soon-to-be-widow, Anna Magnani, in her only screen pairing with fellow force of nature Brando.

4 *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962) After Harper Lee's novel sold six million copies and won the Pulitzer Prize, achieving the status of a genuine pop phenomenon, it was an inevitability that it would head to Hollywood, though no one could've guessed on the consummate excellence of the film adaptation that would appear. Set in Lee's native Alabama in the 1930s – exteriors were shot in her hometown of Monroeville – the film concerns the attempt by lawyer Atticus Finch (Gregory Peck) to defend Tom Robinson (Brock Peters), a black man accused of rape by a no-account white girl, and is beautifully handled by the director Robert



Shadow of fear: Scout looking for Boo Radley in Robert Mulligan's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962)



Forces of nature: Anna Magnani and Marlon Brando in *The Fugitive Kind* (1960)



Reflections in a Golden Eye (1967)

Mulligan, who, though Bronx-born, showed an unusual lyrical sensitivity to the rhythms and textures of Southern life in films including *Baby the Rain Must Fall* (1964, also written by Horton Foote) and *The Man in the Moon* (1991). Three weeks after *Mockingbird*'s Christmas premiere at the Fox Wilshire Theatre in Los Angeles, George Wallace, making his first speech as governor of Alabama, pledged, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever."

5 Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte

(Robert Aldrich, 1964)

Tennessee Williams didn't write a word of *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte*, but Robert Aldrich's follow-up to his smash *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) contains a number of elements that suggest the playwright's influence: the potentate father figure whose image looms large in the imagination of his daughter, the dangerous desperation of gentry gone to seed, and the terrible persistence of suppressed trauma. *Baby Jane?* star Bette Davis, often mistaken for a Southerner due to her role in *Jezebel* (1938), appears opposite Olivia de Havilland, the *Gone with the Wind* (1939) good-girl-gone-bad, who teams with Richmond-born Joe Cotten to persecute Davis's decayed debutante with the memory of a gruesome murder that occurred one awful night in 1927.

6 Reflections in a Golden Eye

(John Huston, 1967)

There had been tentative attempts to adapt Carson McCullers for the screen before, with mediocre results, but the Production Code Administration had to crumble before her *oeuvre*, steeped as it is in stifled and inchoate sexual yearning, could be done any justice. The downfall of the PCA also reinvigorated director John Huston, whose connection to American literature was profound, and who directed the finest adaptation of McCullers's work to date. Huston's *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, a knot of forbidden appetites and misplaced affection set on a Southern army base, boasts affecting performances from Elizabeth Taylor, Julie Harris, Brian Keith and Marlon Brando, whose ramrod-straight (and slightly queer) Major Weldon Penderton, seen smearing himself with cold cream, fumbling with dumbbells and vainly rehearsing normalcy in the mirror, is a sad ogre. To emphasise the film's jaundiced atmosphere, Huston had the original release prints desaturated in post-production, giving DP Aldo Tonti's work



The Beguiled (1971)

a golden burnish. McCullers, whose creative career had effectively ended a decade before due to a series of strokes and personal traumas, died two weeks after the film's premiere.

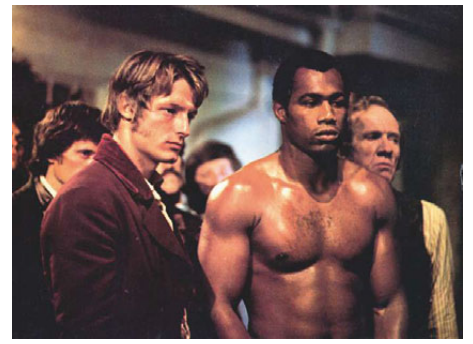
7 The Beguiled (Don Siegel, 1971)

A psychological thriller with a vice-like grip set during the closing days of the Civil War, *The Beguiled*, based on a novel by Thomas P. Cullinan, appeared at the beginning of a remarkable creative run for director Don Siegel that included *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *Charley Varrick* (1973). Shot in the Greek Revival Ashland-Belle Helene Plantation in Louisiana, an actual ante-bellum relic draped in Spanish moss and melancholy history, Siegel's erotic fairytale follows wounded Union soldier John McBurney (Clint Eastwood) as he seeks sanctuary among the loyal Confederate women who remain at a boarding school for young girls, including headmistress Geraldine Page and virginal instructor Elizabeth

'Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte' features the desperation of gentry gone to seed and the terrible persistence of suppressed trauma



The presence of the past: Bette Davis in Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte (1964)



Mandingo (1975)

Hartman, whose performance fairly palpitates with fluttering feeling. Briefly asserting his rooster-in-the-henhouse domain, McBurney soon discovers that war between the states is nothing to war between the sexes.

8 Mandingo (Richard Fleischer, 1975)

Despite being one of only a handful of films to directly address the historical legacy of slavery, *Mandingo* has been dismissed as rank slavesploitation à la *The Legend of Nigger Charley* (1972), or belittled as shocking camp because it happens to feature a jaw-dropping scene of a plummy James Mason, playing the master of the Falconhurst plantation, using a black boy as a footstool to cure his rheumatism. None of this, however, diminishes the considerable visceral power of the film's exploration of the economy of desire behind the trade in flesh, augmented by director Richard Fleischer's masterful *mise en scène*. Hammond (Perry King), heir to Falconhurst, disdains his new wife, Blanche (Susan George) for the caresses of his black "bed wench", Ellen (Brenda Sykes), so Blanche turns her affections to slave Ganymede (Ken Norton), bred as a prizefighter, setting the stage for a last reel worthy of a Jacobean revenge tragedy. Roger Ebert called it "racist trash, obscene





Billy Bob Thornton in *Sling Blade* (1996)

in its manipulation of human beings and feelings”, while its champions (correct, as it happens) include Robin Wood, Elliott Stein and Dave Kehr, who called it “Fleischer’s last great crime film, in which the role of the faceless killer is played by an entire social system”.

9 *Wise Blood* (John Huston, 1979)
Twelve years after *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Huston returned to Southern Gothic themes with his adaptation of *Wise Blood*, a 1952 novel by another lion of Southern fiction, Flannery O’Connor. Macon, Georgia, fills in for O’Connor’s ‘Taulkinham’, where young veteran Hazel ‘Haze’ Motes (Brad Dourif) lands after returning from war abroad and, preaching atheism from street corners, creates his Holy Church of Truth Without Christ. Motes, though he tries to shed his religious upbringing, cannot be rid of his proselytising nature and minister’s mien, any more than O’Connor could escape the mark left on her work by having been raised a Catholic in the majority-Protestant South. Bringing together the cream of Dixie’s character actors (Harry Dean Stanton, Ned Beatty), Huston nails O’Connor’s deadpan comic tone and produces a rollicking monkeyshine that addresses the Southern tradition of ballyhoo, from the medicine show to the evangelical extortionist to the matinee promotional.

10 *Sling Blade* (Billy Bob Thornton, 1996)
Sling Blade’s writer-director Billy Bob Thornton also plays Karl Childers in the film, a man of uncertain mental capacities who has recently been released from a state institution after 17 years. It was a slow-burn, character-based hit of the sort which is practically unimaginable today, and Thornton’s distinctive performance – the hiked-up pants, the grinding-gears voice – was naturally singled out on release. But just as remarkable are the character sketches by John Ritter and Dwight Yoakam playing, respectively, a gay man living with necessary discretion in a small Southern town and a mean drunk whose tirades are at times hysterically inappropriate. It’s worth noting that Ritter’s father, Tex, was a famous country-and-western singer, while Yoakam was one of the greatest country success stories of the 1980s – and musician Thornton’s film reflects the Gothic tradition as it manifests itself in country songwriting.

11 *The Apostle* (Robert Duvall, 1997)
Robert Duvall had taken a small but piquant role in *Sling Blade*, playing Childers’s estranged



Robert Duvall in *The Apostle* (1997)

‘Sling Blade’ is a slow-burn, character-based hit of the sort which is practically unimaginable today

father, and in turn Thornton appears in *The Apostle* as an angry apostate who sets himself in opposition to Duvall’s lead character, Sonny, and his freely integrated church. Though born in southern California, self-described “Navy brat” Duvall comes from one of those Southern families who’ve been the backbone of the American military since the days of Washington. (In fact, he is a distant relation of General Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia.) Duvall, who’d made his film debut as the recluse ‘Boo’ Radley in Mulligan’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*, played the lead in Faulkner adaptation *Tomorrow* in 1972, and made his directorial debut with a documentary about rodeo folk, produced his ultimate passion project in 1997: the character study *The Apostle*, in which he stars as messianic Pentecostal preacher E.F. ‘Sonny’ Dewey. Exiled from his flock in the suburbs of Dallas and on the run from the law after a not-very-preacher-like fit of wrath in which he beats his wife’s lover with a baseball bat, ‘Sonny’ skedaddles to the heart of Cajun Louisiana, building a



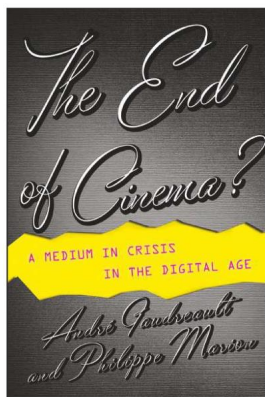
Michael Shannon (right) in *Shotgun Stories* (2007)

new church and congregation from scratch. Featuring a cast filled out with charismatic, unaffected non-professionals, Duvall’s film is a veritable aural tapestry of indigenous sounds, from documentary dialect to gospel shouters.

12 *Shotgun Stories* (Jeff Nichols, 2007)
Another son of Arkansas, like Billy Bob Thornton, Jeff Nichols is a graduate of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, also the Alma Mater of David Gordon Green, who established himself as a specialist in Southern regional subjects. Green produced Nichols’s debut *Shotgun Stories*, which follows three brothers, Son, Boy and Kid (Michael Shannon, Douglas Ligon, Barlow Jacobs, respectively), who become involved in a feud with the second family of their recently deceased father. Engaging at once with a recognisably lived-in blue-collar reality and a Southern mythology drawn from Faulkner’s Snopes trilogy and the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons of Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Nichols’s film has gradually been recognised as the auspicious opening of a noteworthy career. Shannon had already established himself in the early plays of Oklahoman Tracy Letts, works indebted to the Southern Gothic tradition, two of which have been magnificently adapted by William Friedkin (2006’s *Bug* and 2011’s *Killer Joe*). ☺



Of god and men: Brad Dourif and Ned Beatty in the Flannery O’Connor adaptation *Wise Blood* (1979)



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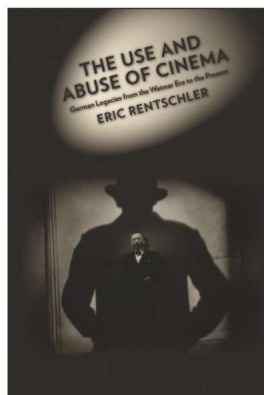
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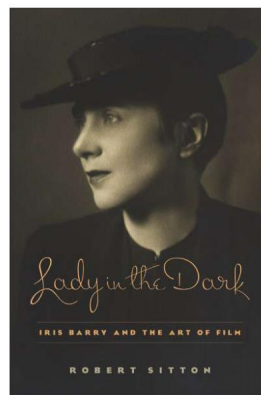
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PREVIEW

THE ACT OF REMEMBERING

Marc Karlin was an innovator of the essay film and a leading voice for independent film in Britain, so why is his work so little known?

By Holly Aylett

When he died suddenly in January 1999, an obituary in the *Independent* described Marc Karlin as “the most significant unknown film-maker working in Britain during the past three decades”. For contemporaries, he was one of the visionaries mapping independent British film culture, with its roots in the 70s and its expansion in the first decades of Channel 4 television. He also filmed his way through decades of huge change, wrestling with the pressures of Thatcherism; the demise of manufacturing; the challenge to socialism after the fall of the Berlin Wall; the shape-shifting impact of digital technologies; and the rise and rise of Rupert Murdoch. But 16 years after his death his 12 essay documentaries have remained largely invisible and his name is absent from the canon of British cinema.

In the late 70s Karlin was working on ideas for his seminal *For Memory* (1982): “A traveller once wrote, ‘In our dreams of future cities, what frightens us is what we most

desire: namely to be free from the tyranny of memory.’” Using the central metaphor of a futuristic city, the documentary explores how heritage, what is protected within the city walls, exists in relation to the vulnerability of what might be recalled beyond the boundaries. It explores how memory is constructed in time, and how images from the past locate us in our present lives in particular ways.

The instability of the image, its openness to interpretation, are central to what is being unravelled in *For Memory*. This is resonant of Chris Marker’s work, in which image is treated as a moment in place and time, and for both Marker and Karlin the understanding of the relation between image and memory produces a constantly shifting philosophical journey. Marc spent his early years in France, meeting Marker when he returned from London to Paris to make a film in 1968; subsequently they collaborated. Marc filmed at the Peugeot works in Sochaux: Marker – who had previously filmed a strike there – was denied access, but Karlin pretended he was filming on behalf of the Common Market. He contributed footage to a project for which Marker gathered offcuts from films made by filmmakers of the Left. Marc recalled going to a place where film cans from around the world – Cuba, Colombia, Canada and Peru – were

stacked along pipes above which sat Marker at his editing console. This project evolved into *Le fond de l’air est rouge* (1977); in 1988, commissioned by the late Michael Kustow, Marc made the UK version for Channel 4, for which Marker came up with the English title *A Grin Without a Cat*.

For both Marker and Karlin, what is at stake in the image is a particular relation to the past; in the development of Marc’s films the act of remembering is necessary to liberate us to construct alternative visions for the future. Marc was deeply uneasy in what Rilke, a century earlier, had called ‘the interpreted world’: he felt he was living at a time saturated by images and their interpretation. He saw his role as a propagator, keeping alive in his audience the hidden meanings of the political unconscious. In his notebooks there are various references to Rilke and one quotation occurs several times: “We are the bees of the invisible. We wildly gather the honey of the invisible to store in the great golden hive.”

In our dreams of future cities, what frightens us is what we most desire: namely to be free from the tyranny of memory



Head in the clouds: Nicholas Farrell as Michael Deakin in Karlin's *The Serpent* (1997)

Part of this task is recovering images, as in *For Memory*, in which three stories, marginalised or distorted in official versions of British history, are recalled: Oliver Cromwell's execution of troops sympathetic to the radical Levellers; the battle of Cable Street, to stop a Fascist march, in the 1930s; and the history of the miners of Clay Cross colliery in Derbyshire. The challenge Marc addresses to us as viewers, citizens and younger generations, is to look more critically at our own contemporary world, and to look again.

In *Nightcleaners* (1975), a documentary made by the Berwick Street Collective about the underpaid and invisible women working to keep the city clean, Marc films one of the cleaners working as any of us might have glimpsed her through an office window. She is registered momentarily from the pavement below as we pass by, such a habitual part of our environment that the meaning of the image is lost to us, leaving the woman fixed in her functional role and effectively invisible. But Marc wanted to film "how that sight is arrested by a consciousness that informs it, looks at it, interprets it, challenges it and wants to change it... but it was all too complicated." Perhaps, but the way in which that intention informs the image-structuring of the whole film has made *Nightcleaners* a landmark for film theorists, and one of the only films Marc worked on that is still occasionally screened.

I saw it first at university when Stephen Heath, professor of English at Cambridge, presented it as an exemplary text for structuralist narrative analysis. Here was a film which had its roots in workers' struggles but whose experimental form took it beyond the perceived limitations of contemporary agitprop cinema. It had a catalytic effect, not least on the editorial of *Screen*, the leading theoretical journal of the time. The reception of *Nightcleaners* added momentum to a major shift in which the editorial began to engage with cinema as social praxis, inviting a discussion with practitioners from the Independent Filmmakers' Association, the IFA, in which Marc was a leading player.

While *Nightcleaners* transcended its historical moment, *For Memory* was promptly forgotten. The film was one of the BBC's first independent commissions, part-funded by the BFI Production Board. Marc complained: "My work is embroiled in the corridors of the BBC. The film is such a precedent for them that they find it difficult to write up a contract. It's as if they think that by doing so things might never be the same again." Completed in 1982, it was only broadcast in 1986, after a long correspondence with the BBC. *For Memory*'s form and length – almost two hours – were uncompromising, but it slipped out almost unnoticed on BBC2 on a bank holiday afternoon.

It was a BBC programme that prompted the formation of the IFA in 1976 – an overview of British independent cinema that managed to ignore more radical work. Marc regarded this exclusion as a form of censorship, and the IFA subsequently led pressure for independent voices to be integral to a proposed new channel. Channel 4 facilitated a decade of experiment which gave creative space in which Marc and his contemporaries challenged existing politics of representation and pushed the limits of



Marc Karlin picketing the BFI in 1977 to support avant-garde venue The Other Cinema

documentary conventions. Moving away from working collectively, in his films for Channel 4 – *Nicaragua Series* (1985), *Utopias* (1989), *Scenes for a Revolution* (1991) and *Between Times* (1993) – Marc evolved his essay documentary practice, developing distinctive strategies: the displacement of singular interpretation through multiple voices; complex literary narration; sequences used as metaphors to explore themes; long tracking shots, whether on location along the rim of a volcano or in a studio shoot, moving between blow-ups of images apparently suspended in 3D.

In a letter to a commissioning editor at Channel 4, written in the shadow of the Broadcasting Act of 1990 when commercial pressures threatened Channel 4's remit and editorial space, Marc restated the case for exploratory, experimental cinema that does not address the viewer as a consumer. He made a distinction between films that "illustrate" and those that "illuminate", films that "rely on pre-held beliefs" and films that "try to locate what lies behind these held correspondences". Seeing film as central to the cultural revolution that empowers social change, he made an impassioned plea for more, not fewer "poets who can take the measure of that revolution".



The Outrage (1995)

In his last films, Marc took the essay documentary form further into the shifting sands of fact and fiction. In *The Outrage* (1995), he travelled through an abstract painting by Cy Twombly, to look at how we relate to art. In *The Serpent* (1997), to explore our complicity in the success of Rupert Murdoch and his tabloid vision, Marc mobilised a cast of characters that included Lenin, Murdoch, the Voice of Reason (Fiona Shaw) and the beleaguered Michael Deakin (Nicholas Farrell), "a Tony Blair supporter by day and a Ken Livingstone supporter by night". All are caught up in an allegorical journey, a playful take on *Paradise Lost*, which starts when Deakin's commuter train comes to an abrupt stop in a train tunnel. The lights go out leaving Deakin haunted by the first words of the evening paper's headline, "Murdoch gets..."

In the past three years the Marc Karlin Archive has collaborated with various regional organisations – including Picture This and the Arnolfini in Bristol, Vivid in Birmingham and the Whitechapel Gallery in London – to screen Marc's films for contemporary audiences. There is a renewed interest in the independent filmmaking of the 70s and, since Channel 4's 30th anniversary, in the contribution of the Independent Film and Video Department, and Marc and his contemporaries, to our film history. The context may have changed for the questions and political unconscious explored in Marc's films, but their layered vision enables the films to transcend their historical moment. His themes are still relevant, and for their ambition and creative achievement deserve to be widely seen. ⑤

i *Between Times*, *The Outrage*, *The Serpent* and *Nightcleaners* will screen at BFI Southbank, London, as part of the 'Cinema born again' season (see 'Once were warriors' feature, page 36). **Marc Karlin: Look Again**, edited by Holly Aylett, has just been published by Liverpool University Press. For further information about Karlin, visit spiritofmarckarlin.com

SOUL STIRRERS

In a trio of blaxploitation films of the early 70s, three of the great soul musicians reinvented the film soundtrack

By Pasquale Iannone

Although by the late 1960s many jazz artists had composed film scores – Miles Davis for *Lift to the Scaffold* (Louis Malle, 1958), Sonny Rollins for *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1965), to name just two – a full score by a soul artist was far more rare. That is, until blaxploitation.

Storming on to the screen post-1968 with tales of powerful black heroes taking on the white establishment, blaxploitation films are probably better remembered for their soundtracks than for their plots, characterisation or visual style. Between 1970 and 1980, dozens of soul stars composed for the screen – Bobby Womack, Edwin Starr, James Brown and many more – but three films released within 12 months of each other early in the decade set the standard for not just the soul music score, but the pop soundtrack in general.

Isaac Hayes, Curtis Mayfield and Marvin Gaye were all three at the height of their powers when they were asked to compose music for *Shaft* (Gordon Parks, 1971), *Super Fly* (Gordon Parks Jr, 1972) and *Trouble Man* (Ivan Dixon, 1972) respectively. In terms of form and content, all three artists had been taking soul music to another level, boldly transcending the limits of the traditional three-minute pop song. They could deal with pressing social problems one minute and matters of love and sex the next, a dexterity perfectly suited to the world of blaxploitation.

In *Shaft* the eponymous private detective (Richard Roundtree) searches for a mobster's kidnapped daughter. 'Theme from *Shaft*' – the most recognisable blaxploitation cue of all – is first used in the opening sequence as the protagonist emerges from the subway on to a crisp, cold New York street. It starts with shuffling cymbals, then wah-wah guitar, then keyboards. The theme continues to build with horns and strings as we follow Shaft walking the busy streets. Diegetic sounds are mostly downplayed, but briefly re-emerge as our hero meets characters along his way. Hayes's vocal comes in, to tell of Shaft's courage, loyalty and – famously – his sexual prowess. 'Theme from *Shaft*' is one of only three pieces on Hayes's soundtrack that feature full vocals. The others are 'Do Your Thing' and 'Soulsville', the latter accompanying a montage sequence in which Shaft – brown leather coat buttoned up tight against the cold – knocks on doors for information about the kidnapped girl. With lyrics that lament the plight of those living in the projects, it stands out as the only song on the soundtrack to refer overtly to the hardships many African-Americans face (in this respect is it closer to Mayfield's songs for *Super Fly*). The remaining *Shaft* themes are instrumentals, their lush orchestration unmistakably Hayes. 'Ellie's Love Theme', in particular, includes a spine-tinglingly beautiful melody, played by Hayes on the vibraphone, which accompanies a brief but tender love scene, shot from a raised angle.



Cover charged: the *Super Fly* soundtrack, featuring Curtis Mayfield, Ron O'Neal and Sheila Frazier

Mayfield's score for *Super Fly* has little of the smoothness and romantic sheen of *Shaft*. The film tells the story of a drug dealer called Priest (Ron O'Neal) looking to broker one final deal before escaping his life of crime. Mayfield sings seven songs, each commenting on a particular character or situation. Like *Shaft*, the film opens with a high-angle shot of a wintry NYC streetscape, but there's no hero to follow here – instead we track two drug addicts looking for a fix. The camera draws in and we get distant

The songs could deal with pressing social problems one minute and matters of love and sex the next

notes of an organ, the rattle of bongo drums, cymbals and then the scuzziest fuzz guitar – an aural reflection of the addicts' disorientation as well as their desperate surroundings. The



Trouble Man: Marvin Gaye and Robert Hooks



Shaft: Richard Roundtree and Isaac Hayes

lyrics of this song, 'Little Child Runnin' Wild', are hard-hitting: "Where is the mayor / Who'll make all things fair / He lives outside / Our polluted air"; "Painful rip / In my upper hip / I guess it's time / To take another trip." Like several of Mayfield's other songs, 'Little Child' returns throughout the film in an instrumental version. Oddly, the title sequence is accompanied not by 'Super Fly' but by an instrumental version of 'Freddie's Dead', a song about the death of one of Priest's friends. For the whole scene we're driving with Priest – the director cuts from the gleaming silver front of his '71 Cadillac Eldorado to interior shots of the protagonist at the wheel.

Like *Shaft*, *Super Fly* includes an artfully shot love scene. Priest and his girlfriend Georgia (Sheila Frazier) share a bath and Mayfield's sensuous 'Give Me Your Love' accompanies close, lingering, slow-motion images of their soapy intertwining limbs. Another famous piece, 'Pusherman', is heard in its entirety just before the film's final third and accompanies a montage of stills, a kind of self-contained photo-essay, showing the dealing and consumption of cocaine.

We move from East to West Coast for the LA-set *Trouble Man*. This is by far the least known of the three films (as yet unavailable in the UK on DVD or Blu-ray), but Gaye's album has become a classic, a favourite not just with Gaye himself but with other songwriters, such as Joni Mitchell, who covered the title track with bassist Kyle Eastwood in 1998. In fact, the *Trouble Man* album released by Motown in 1972 did not feature the film's original score but 13 pieces revised and/or re-recorded by Gaye. The actual film score only saw the light of day four decades later, as part of 2012's 40th Anniversary Expanded Edition.

In Dixon's film, the suave, stoic Mr T (Robert Hooks) is a *Shaft*-like private investigator who becomes embroiled in a Californian gang war while locked in a battle of wits with a tenacious police captain. Gaye's music follows the model of the traditional film score more closely than *Shaft* or *Super Fly*. The music is used sparingly, to fill gaps or briefly underscore action – unlike Parks and Parks Jr, Dixon rarely allows it to drive sequences, with the notable exception of the opening credits and the build-up to the film's climactic showdown. The opening follows Mr T as he drives along the Californian coast: "I come up hard baby, but now I'm cool," Gaye sings, with his characteristically inventive layered vocals, "I didn't make it baby, playing by the rules." In the later scene, a suited and black-gloved T closes in on his last surviving foe. In a dialogue-free four minutes, Gaye is given free rein with his instrumental 'Car Ride/Looking For Pete'. The tick-tock of cymbals and bongo drums recalls *Shaft* and *Super Fly*, but, as it builds, the piece takes on more of a jazz-funk feel.

The musicologist Andrew Flory has rightly pointed out that *Trouble Man* is Gaye "at his funkier, his most cerebral and his most adventurous", a statement that could easily be applied to the work of Hayes and Mayfield too. Indeed, a revisit of *Shaft*, *Super Fly* and *Trouble Man* confirms that while all three pictures hold up well on a visual level, it's the music that contributes most to their soulful power. 📀

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

For the poets of the Beat generation, Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp became a symbol and an inspiration



By Lisa Stein Haven

The philosopher Francis W. Dauer once located the essence of Charlie Chaplin's comedy in "incongruities" – moments such as the one in *Modern Times* when the Little Tramp entertains a police officer in his jail cell as if it were a cheerful parlour. The Beat generation poets' adoption of the Little Tramp persona as an icon for both their work and their countercultural movement – their lifestyle – seems just such an incongruity. Jack Kerouac, who in 1957 defined the Beats as "a generation of crazy illuminated hipsters" who roamed America, "ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way," seemed drawn to the Little Tramp's rootlessness. The poet John Ciardi, writing in 1960, made the connection overt: "[The Beat] is Charlie Chaplin ridiculously in love and being chased by cops [...] He lives in skid-row-under-the-stars in the company of other 'personal madmen poets'."

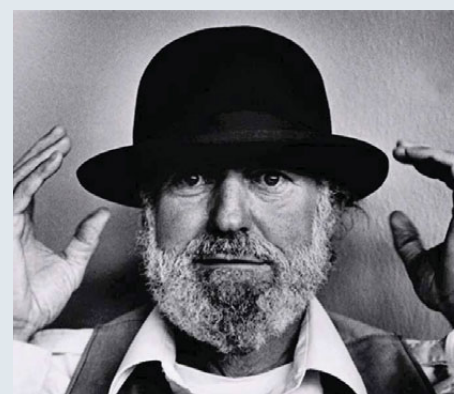
Many Beat generation artists identified with Charlie Chaplin the man's political problems and subsequently attached themselves to the Little Tramp persona, taking it as a symbol of the recalcitrant and anarchic elements, but also the inherent beauty and simplicity of their philosophy and lifestyle. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, foster father and supporter of the Beats, named his *City Lights* magazine, bookshop and press in San Francisco after Chaplin's film. Ferlinghetti equates the poet with both Socrates's gadfly, an enemy of the state, and Chaplin's Little Tramp; the equation underlies poems such as 'Constantly Risking Absurdity', based on scenes from Chaplin's *The Circus* (1928), 'Director of Alienation', inspired by *Modern Times* (1936), and 'Adieu à Charlot: Second Populist Manifesto', a homage to Chaplin on his death in 1977, which crystallises Ferlinghetti's conception of Chaplin's persona as representing the essence of humanity:

"Chaplin is dead but I'd wear his bowler having outlived all our myths but his the myth of the pure subjective the collective subjective the Little Man in each of us."

The Beats were also drawn to the Little Tramp's nonconformity. Kerouac took inspiration from the Chaplin film in which he is the least Tramp-like, the black comedy *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947). In the 52nd Chorus of his 'Mexico City Blues', an underrated and misunderstood long poem with a jazz aesthetic, written in 1957, Kerouac focuses on Chaplin's willingness in that film to not conform to his beloved Little Tramp's known attributes and assume the role of a killer:

"I'm crazy everywhere like Charlie Chaplin dancing in moral turpitude playing Bluebeard killer on satin asskiss couches with itchy mustache."

It's clear from archival correspondence that Kerouac discussed the film with Allen



Lawrence Ferlinghetti in Chaplin bowler

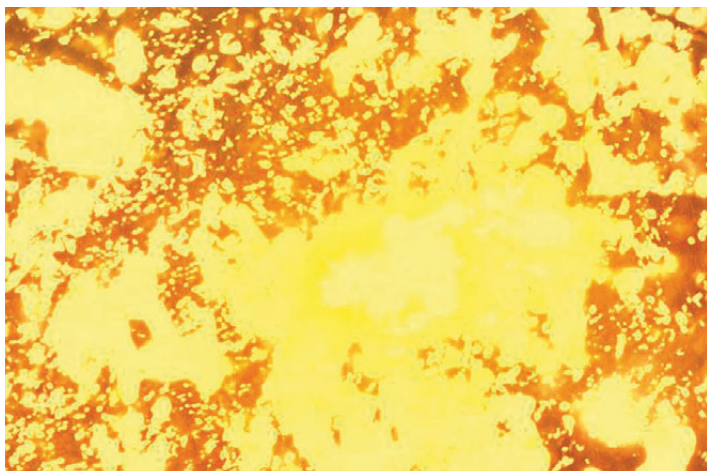
I'm crazy everywhere like Charlie Chaplin dancing in moral turpitude

Ginsberg – the latter mentions the fact in a 1948 letter, and it was not a short-term interest for him. In 1961 Ginsberg and his partner Peter Orlovsky, after watching Chaplin's *A King in New York* (1957) in India, wrote a parody letter. 'Collaboration: Letter to Charlie Chaplin', published in Orlovsky's collection *Clean Asshole Poems & Smiling Vegetable Songs*, reveals that both poets had been earnest Chaplin fans since childhood: "Do you realize how many times we have seen yr pictures in Newark & cried in the dark at the roses. Do you realize how many summers in Coney Island we sat in open air theatre & watched you disguised as a lamp-shade in scratchey down stairs eternity."

Much as James Agee had done in his unpublished film script from the late 40s *The Tramp's New World*, Ginsberg and Orlovsky imagined the Little Tramp as sole survivor of a nuclear holocaust: "You should make a great picture about the Atom Bomb!" Envisioned by the two poets as "a grubby old janitor with white hair", the Little Tramp "crawls out of the pile of human empire state building bodies [...] ending looking blankly into the camera with the eternal aged Chaplin-face looking blankly, raptly into the eyes of the God of Solitude." In this letter that was neither sent nor received, Ginsberg and Orlovsky insist: "There is yr fitting final statement Sir Chaplin, you will save the world if ya make it – but yr final look must be so beautiful that it doesn't matter if the world is saved or not."

Ferlinghetti, now 96, still regards the poets' connection to the Little Tramp persona as valid and significant. In a 2013 letter he wrote that the McCarthyites had deprived Americans "of one of the great creative spirits of the 20th century", a spirit "that still survives in the City Lights Bookstore!" Chaplin and his silent Little Fellow – beauty, simplicity, non-conformity and Beat beatific-ness: perhaps there exists no more apt symbol of this distinctly American aesthetic movement. 📀

IN PURSUIT OF THE INEFFABLE



Tone, texture and movement: *Elements of Nothing* (2007)



Untapped cinematic potential: *In Your Star* (2011)

The dreamlike films of Makino Takashi exploit technology to create unforgettable visual and aural experiences

By Jasper Sharp

Expansive dreamscapes of unfolding hypnagogic forms which coalesce then melt before the eyes as soon as one thinks one has grasped them, the films of Makino Takashi (born Tokyo, 1978) are a mesmerising, near indescribable experience. His works are created through multiple layers of mainly organic imagery such as water, trees and occasionally human figures. Their very names hint at a universe of untapped cinematic potential – *The Shadow and Stardust* (2006), *Elements of Nothing* (2007) and *still in cosmos* (2009).

Sometimes the visual referents are clearly discernible. *No is E* (2006) consists of up to five layers of long takes of the sea on 8mm film, the undulations melding to suggest the murmurs of a primordial id. The latter movements of *The Seasons* (2008) consist of subliminal shifting shots of foliage and grass. In contrast, the more recent immersive live cinema of *Space Noise 3D* (2014) and *Phantom Nebula* (2014) have exploited developments in digital technology, the latter using up to 800 superimposed image tracks in which individual high-resolution images are blown up to reveal otherwise imperceptible patterns, diffusing into a chaotic abstraction of visual noise that evokes a perceptual world stripped down to its bare atoms.

Occasionally the real world intrudes more ominously into these meticulous explorations of tone, texture and movement, which can be from 15 to 60 minutes long. That is what happens in *Generator* (2011), which won Rotterdam's Tiger Short Film Award in 2012. Commissioned by the Aichi Arts Center in Nagoya to make a short film on the theme of 'the body', Makino intended the overhead footage of gleaming buildings and traffic streaming through Tokyo's streets, shot from a helicopter on 8mm, 16mm and 35mm, as a meditation on the notion of 'the city as organism'; but after the meltdown of the Fukushima reactor in March 2011 a darker, more chilling aspect intruded almost subliminally during editing.

Makino dislikes using the term 'experimental cinema' – something he has described as "a stereotyped genre of films with a closed and established culture". His creative stimulus derives from a traffic accident that left him hospitalised when he was five. During an operation he experienced a series of overwhelmingly vivid hallucinations and was left with an obsessive desire to communicate these beautiful, otherworldly visions. That process began with his first forays into filmmaking in 1997. "I continue to dream about an indeterminate but systematic lump-like film that never ceases to change and connects with the consciousness and mental state of the viewers as well as each personal memory."

Makino's work appears to explore the same ineffable domain as Stan Brakhage. In fact, he is more familiar than most with the films of this American trailblazer: in his former day job, as a colourist and telecine operator at Japan's oldest post-production company, Yokocine (founded 1923), he was responsible for scanning much of Brakhage's work for archival purposes.

However, one crucial point of difference is the attention he gives to his equally amorphous soundscapes, which fuse with the visuals to create a uniquely synaesthetic experience. At times it feels as if the atonal drones have been consciously synchronised with the images so as

The atonal drones trick the viewer into perceiving patterns in the sensory flux that may not be there



still in cosmos (2009)

to trick the viewer into perceiving patterns in the sensory flux that may not be there. Makino cites the work of the avant-garde filmmaker and sound artist Tony Conrad, which he encountered at the Athénée Française Cultural Center in Tokyo in 1997, as an influence.

Makino himself composed the hypnotic sound collages for earlier breakthrough films such as *EVE* (2004) and *The Intimate Stars* (2004), before realising he had reached his technical limitations. His six collaborations with the Chicago-born, Tokyo-based musician Jim O'Rourke, between 2006 and 2011, opened the gates for a fuller, more expressive consideration of the sonic component. "Jim took a different approach to image and sound each time. The most important thing about Jim is his huge knowledge of cinema, both old and new, as well as experimental film, so he never just follows the images when watching the films but responds to things like movement and colour very purely. I learned a lot from him."

O'Rourke instilled a greater sense of confidence in Makino, inspiring him towards more performance-based presentations in which the collaborative aspect is to the fore. Makino has returned to creating his own compositions, but recent screenings have also involved live sound-mixing by Makino and improvised accompaniments by experimental musicians such as Hasegawa Hiroshi, Austria's Manuel Knapp, and the Korean cellist Okkyung Lee, who performed to *Emaki/Light* (2011, co-realised with Ishida Takashi) at Rotterdam in 2012.

Since then, he has continued to promote his work in Japan alongside kindred spirits Ishida, Shinkan Tamaki, Rei Hayama and the American media artist Ben Russell as part of the [+](Plus) screening project. Makino has also undertaken regular tours across Europe, performing *Space Noise 3D* and *Phantom Nebula* at the Papay Gyro Nights in the Orkney Isles and with Sally Golding at London's Café Oto earlier this year. He is set to return to London – which he first visited in 2001 to study under the Brothers Quay – later this year as part of a wider European tour. 📍

i Makino's works are available on the DVD collection *Makino Takashi Film Works vol. 1 with Jim O'Rourke* (2010), and also included on *Plus Documents 2009-2013* (2014)

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

There was plenty of excitement at Colombia's FICCI this year – down in the auditorium as well as up on the screen

By Michael Pattison

In *Explore Everything*, his excellent study of 'place-hacking', Bradley L. Garrett tells how in 2010 he and other urban explorers came upon a statue of Lenin at Nohra, an abandoned Soviet airbase in Germany, and felt compelled to climb, slap, assault and photograph it: "On some level, this was just what we needed in the moment – and something that clearly would not have been encouraged inside a heritage park." An implication is that such instinctive mischief is as valid a response as the politer actions permitted in controlled environments such as museums, galleries and cinemas.

That is worth bearing in mind when attending South America's longest running film festival: Colombia's alluringly lively and healthily hectic Festival Internacional de Cine de Cartagena de Indias (FICCI), this year celebrating its 55th edition. On the one hand, to sit among local audiences for any of the films showcased at the Teatro Adolfo Mejía, located just inside the colonial walls of Cartagena's old town, was to feel the buzz of an active if not always attentive mob. On the other hand, one quickly learned that what might be an occasional interruption back home was here continual: audible murmurs, incessant ringtones, shameless phone chats, frequent camera flashes and the sea of upward glows from portable devices. Liveliness is a double-edged sword.

There was no predicting what would happen. Kim Ki-duk received a rock star's welcome, while Pedro Costa's much-travelled *Horse Money* prompted more walkouts and expressions of boredom than any other film I saw. Even a work as austere in its treatment of human suffering as the Chilean-Argentinian co-production *The Mud Woman* couldn't contain the chaos – its pivotal rape scene was almost as upsetting as the nattering that carried on through it.

That some films managed to placate unruly behaviour suggests, however, that Cartagena's cinema-going public isn't entirely inattentive. *White Out, Black In*, the first feature of the Brazilian filmmaker Adirley Queirós, held the room so rapt that twice there was a palpable wave of suspense when the DCP malfunctioned. Set on the distant outskirts of Brasília, the film traces the daily lives of two old friends haunted by an act of police brutality and white-on-black racism in the 1980s. With the manufactured landscape of Brazil's uniquely futuristic capital present in the extreme background of these outposts, Queirós mounts a study of geographical and social displacement that is frequently amusing and inherently melancholic.

At least two other films captivated locals. Colombian director Franco Lolli's *Gente de bien*, another first feature, is a likeable neorealist-tinted drama in which a ten-year-old boy Eric (precocious newcomer Bryan Santamaría) goes to spend Christmas with his father (Carlos



Waiting to exhale: Marquim do Tropa in the tense Brazilian film *White Out, Black In*

To sit among local audiences at the Teatro Adolfo Mejía was to feel the buzz of an active if not always attentive mob

Fernando Pérez, also excellent), a carpenter who barely scrapes a living by mending furniture for the better off (see review, page 79). Mexican thriller *600 Miles*, which won its director Gabriel Ripstein the best first feature prize in Berlin, also cleaves to realism; it focuses on a lengthy car journey shared by a Mexican teenager smuggling in military-standard guns from the US and an ATF officer he has kidnapped. The latter is played by an on-form Tim Roth, who keeps the film together even in its sillier moments, but the outstanding performance is by Harrison Thomas, whose idiosyncratic cockiness recalls a young Edward Norton.



Cartagena's Teatro Adolfo Mejía

Cinema being a social event in Cartagena, concentration levels fluctuate dramatically. Like Garrett's urban explorers, audiences use the auditorium to express their needs rather than allowing it to impose social contracts. Every film festival has some kind of educational remit – to promote cinema as an art, to build audiences – but this critic saw reasons to be sceptical about the effectiveness of Cine en los Barrios, the festival's inclusion and outreach programme, which screens films in the region's more impoverished quarters. How revealing, for instance, was the lack of interest displayed by students during one morning showing at a local university?

A vanguard ethic is integral to FICCI. Don Víctor Nieto Nuñez founded the festival, with local businessmen, in 1960 and steered the ship steadily through its first 48 years, until he died in 2008, aged 92. It has continued to prioritise Latin and Ibero-American cinemas while using corporate input to fund and appeal to a more international cinephile heritage – a contradiction that found its most fitting avatar in industry delegates enjoying complimentary lobster one afternoon across the water from the city's many concrete skeletons of unfinished real estate.

Multiple sponsorship deals mean that all screenings and events are free, with admission on a first come, first served basis. Indeed, rolling up with my delegate's badge for a Colombian film only to find it already full, I was turned away – humbled by horizontality. No fuss, no privileges; such madcap beauty is a far cry from the strictly upheld hierarchies of European equivalents. And that's kind of how it should be. 6

new wave films



Winter Sleep

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

This year's Palme d'Or winner from Nuri Bilge Ceylan is an epic dissection of a man and a marriage, set in a hotel carved from the rocks of Cappadocia. Like Ceylan's previous *Once upon a time in Anatolia* it's based on Chekhov stories to produce a multi-layered masterwork from a film-maker at the very peak of his powers.

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'Nuri Bilge Ceylan, of *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* has made another testing marathon about human beings marooned in humanity. Again it's glorious; again it's talky;... Again it's the best thing to be seen in any city or country where it's showing.'

Nigel Andrews, The Financial Times

'A tour de force of writing, acting and meticulous mise-en-scène as it steadily and surely makes its mesmerising way through a maze of deftly interwoven themes. Gorgeous to look at, and packed with astute psychological, social and ethical insights... a marvellous achievement'.

Geoff Andrew, Sight & Sound



'The dialogue is so rich and literary, the ideas so fascinating...that Ceylan's 7th film is never short of enthralling.'

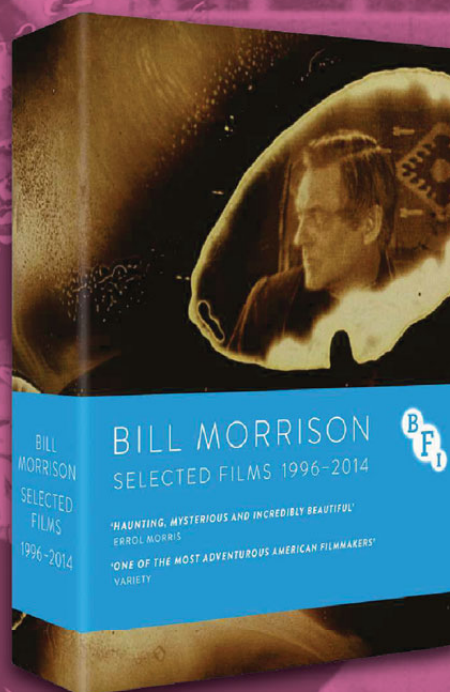
Emma Simmonds, The List

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Reviews



71 **Cobain: Montage of Heck**

Brett Morgen's film is arguably as much an animated edition of Kurt Cobain's journals – pages of doodles, daydreams, draft lyrics, resolutions and life-in-a-band shopping lists – as it is a biopic



60 Films of the month



68 Films



94 Home Cinema



104 Books



Matthias Schoenaerts and Carey Mulligan as Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba in Thomas Vinterberg's adaptation of the Thomas Hardy classic

Far from the Madding Crowd

United Kingdom/USA 2015
Director: Thomas Vinterberg
Certificate 12A 118m 46s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Danish director Thomas Vinterberg returns to the themes of innocence and answerability explored in his contemporary-set *The Hunt* (2012), with an adaptation of a novel not touched in cinema since 1967: Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*, published in 1874.

This is Vinterberg's first period drama, his third English-language film, and surprising new territory for the co-founder of Dogme 95. His *Festen* (1998), for which he took no directing credit, inaugurated the movement, which – among other principles – prohibited genre films. Nevertheless, just as French filmmaker Pascale Ferran's *Lady Chatterley* (2006) – another adaptation of a key English novel by a non-native director – impressed with its perspicacious rendering of an allusive landscape not her own, so Vinterberg's otherness has opened his eyes to the distinctive Dorset setting of Hardy's beloved book.

Working in Vinterberg's favour, perhaps, is that Hardy's Wessex – setting for many of his major novels – is fictitious, a “realistic dream country”, as he put it in his preface; a pastoral stage in south-west England on which to pit his heroine, Bathsheba, against three rival suitors: the shepherd Gabriel Oak, the landowner Mr Boldwood and the soldier Sergeant Troy. The story is a battle of wills, in which Bathsheba – played here by Carey Mulligan – bolts from societal pressure to marry, making her choice when she is good and ready.

For many viewers, Vinterberg's film will come equipped with multiple filters: that of the book, and of the – until now – definitive screen adaptation, John Schlesinger's 1967 adaptation starring Julie Christie in the principal role. Any modification Vinterberg makes is easily observable. And indeed, the subtle inflections he gives to character and action – to support his overarching outlook – are made starker by the film's beginning: an almost scene-by-scene remake of Schlesinger's. Owing to the doubling of these establishing scenes, the discrepancies between Christie's character and Mulligan's are clear, and their difference impacts the politics of blame that underpin each film. Where Christie

primps in the mirror at the approaching figure of Oak, about to make his marriage proposal (the first of many for Bathsheba), Mulligan coolly washes her face. Upon inheriting her uncle's farm, this Bathsheba handles the reins of her horse and trap, hat-to-toe in cinnabar-red. Christie, by contrast, is chauffeured to her fresh start of fiscal



Bathsheba with Sergeant Troy (Tom Sturridge)



Vinterberg doesn't fawn on his heroine, and when he does close in, the camera's gaze is frequently deflected elsewhere, towards the object of her eye

and outspokenness – as righteous and radical as these qualities may be in a 19th-century female.

While David Nicholls's script subverts the period's perception of the female temperament – hysteric, delicate, emotional, passive – by pressing it on the men of the film, Vinterberg destabilises the Victorian notion of a woman's role with his camerawork. There are far fewer close-ups of Bathsheba's face than to be expected in a film of this genre. Vinterberg doesn't fawn on his heroine, and when he does close in, the camera's gaze is frequently deflected elsewhere, towards the object of her eye. There are twin church scenes in which she and her lady's maid hold *sotto voce* conference about Boldwood and Oak, who stand in titillating proximity to each other, the better for Bathsheba to make her comparison. Likewise, the film firmly traces her furtive marriage to the thrusting, boyish Troy to their first fleeting meeting in the perimeter woods of her property, when her dress becomes caught on his spur – or perhaps it is the other way around? As she holds the lantern up close to her quarry we see plainly that she likes a pretty face.

Mulligan is terrific in this role, her multivalent delivery of the dialogue doing much to enrich her character. There is genuine intrigue in watching Bathsheba – who seemed so impervious, a pillar of self-knowledge – contemplating going to a man she does not know; this Troy, a perfect stranger.

Vinterberg took a greater risk with the casting of his men. Oak – like Mr Darcy or *Jane Eyre's* Mr Rochester – is a prototypically English hero, but the Belgian Matthias Schoenaerts brings the flint passion of his role in *Rust and Bone* (2012) to the long-suffering, persevering Gabriel. Meanwhile Michael Sheen makes Boldwood's piteousness amusing and still succeeds in having us feel

protectively towards his character. In a scene reminiscent of the Christmas dinner party in John Huston's *The Dead* (1987), Boldwood rises to sing with Bathsheba, and we are breathless with hope that his ecstasies will not get the better of him and make him stammer his harmony.

Tom Sturridge may be the only weak link, too juvenile for Troy. And yet if at first he seems startled, exposed, by the camera, his unblinking delivery becomes by degrees the barefacedness of the part. Hardy's self-dramatising Troy has a taste for revenge-play convention, and Sturridge's crude acting style brings this quality to the fore. In one scene, his comely crying makes Bathsheba's own pain an undercard to his main act. There is something of this outperforming to all the menfolk in the film that serves to make the oftentimes brittle Bathsheba more sympathetic. They have shinned her to heights of emotion she cannot reach, and there is great pathos in this.

If it weren't enough that Vinterberg had revived this classic narrative with painstaking sensitivity so that it may better appeal to modern audiences, he has also made a film that is beautiful to behold. It is as though Vinterberg took inspiration from the agrarian paintings of Jean-François Millet, reproducing less the tableaux of works like *The Sheepfold*, *The Potato Harvest* and *The Shepherdess* than their qualities of light; their morning, dusk and night. His *mise en scène* is effectively intertextual, making Bathsheba a Persephone by dropping her under the canopy of a bluebell wood, to be tempted there by Troy into the Underworld.

The difficulty with adapting a book for film is that there isn't the time to get to know our characters in the fullness of their original description. Through the accretion of small actions and details, we sit in intimacy with each of them, share in their seclusion. By the time they reach the screen, they are too often condemned to caricatures. By means other than lexical, Vinterberg has conveyed these complex persons to screen, and so in an industry saturated with low-grade period adaptations, his stands apart. May all our British novels be blessed with such a director. **S**

responsibility and, twisting in the bench-seat, waves gaily behind her.

No adaptation of Hardy's novel can help but address the question at its core: how much is Bathsheba at fault for the tragedy that befalls two of the men who would wed her? Does the manner in which Bathsheba keeps Boldwood at arm's length abet his slavish adoration? Or does his idealising, all-consuming love cause him to take leave of logic and bring misfortune on himself and others?

Vinterberg's version shows us a woman whose priority is to be always in possession of her senses; whose vanity is one of high self-regard rather than one of appearance. By making her more self-aware, less frisky than Christie's gambolling girl, he tempers the suggestion that she has kindled the chaos with flirting. Rather, the wording of her candid rejection of Oak is key to this Bathsheba: she could countenance being a bride, if it didn't mean being a wife. She wishes to be at the heart of things, but wants nothing to do with the people who could put her there. It is for Bathsheba to learn over the course of the film that there are few experiences worth having that do not encompass other people, and that she cannot control their behaviour by bravado, poise

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Andrew MacDonald
Allon Reich
Written by
David Nicholls
Based on the novel
by Thomas Hardy
**Director of
Photography**
Charlotte Bruus
Christensen
Edited by

Claire Simpson
Production Designer
Kave Quinn
Music
Craig Armstrong
Sound Designer
Glenn Freemantle
Costume Designer
Janet Patterson
©Tempco DNA
Limited, Twentieth

Century Fox Film
Corporation, British
Broadcasting
Corporation and
TSG Entertainment
Finance LLC
**Production
Companies**
Fox Searchlight
Pictures presents
in association with
BBC Films and TSG

Entertainment a DNA
Films production
Executive Producer
Christine Langan

Cast
Carey Mulligan
Bathsheba Everdene
Matthias
Schoenaerts
Gabriel Oak

Michael Sheen
William Boldwood
Tom Sturridge
Sergeant Francis Troy
Juno Temple
Fanny Robin
Jessica Barden
Liddy

Dolby Digital
In Colour
Prints by

FotoKem
[2.35:1]

Distributor
20th Century Fox
International (UK)

Dorset, England, 1870. Bathsheba Everdene, an orphan working her aunt's farm, rejects a marriage proposal from shepherd Gabriel Oak. Oak's dog drives his flock off a cliff edge, forcing him to forfeit his farm. Bathsheba moves to nearby Weatherbury on inheriting her uncle's farm. Oak, seeking work, helps to put out a barn fire at Weatherbury, not knowing that it belongs to Bathsheba. She employs him as a bailiff. Encouraged by her lady's maid, Bathsheba sends a Valentine's card to wealthy local farmer Boldwood, whom she has seen at the corn exchange. Former farmhand Fanny Robin misses the appointed time to wed her sweetheart Sergeant Troy, who believes that she has jilted him. After crossing paths with a trespassing Troy, Bathsheba later meets with him in secret, and they kiss. Resolutely refusing

Boldwood's marriage proposals, Bathsheba marries Troy. Soon afterwards she confesses to Oak that she has misgivings about the marriage. Troy and a vagrant, pregnant Fanny meet by chance and arrange to rendezvous the next day, but Fanny dies in the night. When Fanny's coffin is brought to Weatherbury, her last known residence, Bathsheba discovers her husband's secret. Troy walks into the sea, and is believed dead. Boldwood throws a party, certain that the supposedly widowed, bankrupted Bathsheba will accept his hand in marriage when he asks her again that night. Troy, returned, confronts Bathsheba as she leaves Boldwood's home. Boldwood shoots Troy dead, and is imprisoned. Oak leaves the farm, headed for America. Bathsheba follows after him. They kiss, and return together to the farm.

Glassland

Ireland/United Kingdom 2014

Director: Gerard Barrett

Certificate 15 92m 50s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Nearly every taxi driver has one – those little pine-tree air fresheners dangling from the rear-view mirror. Jack Reynor's hard-pressed Dublin cabby takes it a bit further, though, hanging a small cameo of the Madonna and Child underneath his vehicle's fake-evergreen odour eater. Writer-director Gerard Barrett tellingly points up this tiny glint of the Renaissance amid the quotidian grunge of the Irish capital's insalubrious outskirts, a deft reminder of the timeless bond between mother and son. It's not framed in close-up but seen in a mid-shot taking in the car's dashboard, windscreen and the world beyond. As such, it's almost as if the filmmaker is trusting the viewer to notice it – but there it is. Indeed, its decisive yet underplayed placement in the narrative – and the way this time-honoured image combines individual intimacy and universal resonance in a single gesture – exemplifies what's so impressive about the 27-year-old Irishman's sophomore feature.

Reynor, previously seen as the errant, privileged schoolboy in Lenny Abrahamson's *What Richard Did* (2012), here takes it down a few socioeconomic notches as John, who drives his beaten-up cab all the hours his dodgy boss will give him, his mother on his mind throughout. What state will she be in when he gets back to their council house? Collapsed in the doorway? Unconscious in a pool of her own vomit? Maybe not even there at all? There's an element of surprise when you're son and carer to an alcoholic like Toni Collette's Jean, but the frustration and sadness of seeing your mother slowly drinking herself towards oblivion become a near-unbearable constant. After the latest hospitalisation, the doctor tells John that she must quit or die, the threat of mortality spring-loading the narrative thereafter – we wonder how far down the road to recovery mother and son will travel – but also allowing the film to contemplate the fundamental issues behind her seemingly self-destructive trajectory. On the surface, *Glassland* adeptly keeps us invested in the day-to-day challenges of alcoholism and its collateral damage; beneath this, however, the film's real aim is to uncover deep disjunctions between the ego-driven directives of the private self and the communal imperatives shaping our social identity – a fracturing that, as Barrett's carefully calibrated storytelling lays out, affects both mother and son.

From the very opening scenes, the cold blue-grey of the council-house walls and the watery light seeping in through net curtains establish a sort of insidious lonesomeness, underscored by the astute blocking of the performers. Reynor's propensity to keep his baseball cap pulled down as he stares into the middle-distance not only establishes his apartness but prompts us to wonder just what it is he's looking so thoughtful about. The spare and elliptical exposition establishing that he works for a cab company with a sideline in moving illicit persons and substances further draws us in. And then, just as the terrifying extent of Jean's problem emerges in a drunken fit positively raging with intensity, Barrett adds to the complexity



Glass half full: Jack Reynor as John with his alcoholic mother Jean, played by Toni Collette

by revealing that she has a Down's Syndrome son named Kit, who is living in care but whom she has absolutely no desire to see. Equal to the guttural demands of the local accent and thoroughly convincing in the skew-whiff physicality of the serious pisshead, Collette is also devastating in a seven-minute monologue in which she maintains, with a bracing absence of sentimentality, that Kit's birth scared off her husband (also John's father), destroying her happiness and consigning her to a lonely life with only the bottle for company. Never mind what society – or the listening John, or the audience – thinks, her inner demon is telling her to have another drink and damn the lot of them.

The conventional filmic approach would be to follow this wayward mother through the counselling process, with all its scope for shouty set pieces, towards a potential redemption and reaffirmation of her maternal instincts, but it's a mark of Barrett's confidence in his distinctive take on the material that this isn't his prime focus. Instead, the film concentrates

The title 'Glassland' perhaps refers to the divide between interior and exterior realms in lives, where the Church no longer makes sense of our place in things



John with his friend Shane (Will Poulter)




The visitor: Jean with Kit, played by Harry Nagle

perhaps even to an idealised childhood he may never actually have experienced given his booze-afflicted circumstances. Hence Barrett tantalisingly posits the idea that this yearning, unfulfilled inner self might be the determining factor behind the model son/friend/worker the world sees. Will goodness provide its own reward for this saintly character? That's an especially pertinent question given the sacrifices Reynor's protagonist will eventually make to provide the best hope for his mother's wellbeing.

When that crunch moment eventually comes, Reynor, whose every gesture in the film has been directed with striking precision, casts his eyes significantly skyward, which has us wondering again about the spiritual significance of that Madonna and Child dangling off his rear-view mirror. There's no other religious iconography in the film, after all. Instead the camera is often looking out through windows – of cars, the council house, the clinic – the title *Glassland* perhaps referring to the divide between interior and exterior realms in lives, where the Church no longer helps us to make sense of our place in things. Listen to this though: "A silent friend, a friend who would never hurt me, who always made things better if only for a little while." That's Jean talking about the booze in terms you might

reserve for spiritual solace in an uncaring world. Moreover, the film's haunting final frame, in which John stands poised in a doorway, leaves us with a resonating ambiguity. Have his apparently selfless acts been a stealthy pathway towards self-destruction? Or is his seeming goodness a way of providing a secular, very personal balm against a despairing realisation that he can't repair the past and reclaim his childhood?

Bruno Dumont got there first with the title *La Vie de Jésus* (1997) but it could fit just as well here, and Barrett's film certainly has welcome echoes of early Dumont. True, the extraordinary performances have a bit more naturalistic lift to them, yet the weak northern light, the elliptical storytelling and, most of all, the stillness of the frame somehow allow a seemingly everyday story to radiate and reveal an inner life that's captivating and immersive in the way it combines expressive acuity with humane insight.

For a second feature this is the real deal, the best Irish film in years, and proof that for all the expanded horizons of its recent international productions with Messrs Skolimowski, Sorrentino and Lanthimos, Dublin's Element Pictures continues to foster local talent. In this case, a farmer's son from Kerry with (fingers crossed) a big future ahead of him. 

on where Jean's travails leave John, damaged child of a damaged parent. Outwardly, he seems well adjusted – a hard worker, a resolute carer, a loyal friend to his best mate (Will Poulter's gobby Shane, bringing some welcome humour). The more we spend quiet, solitary time with him, however, the more we get a cumulative sense of someone uneasy in his own skin.

There's a sort of congruence here with Barrett's modest but potent debut *Pilgrim Hill* (2013), which traced the anguish of a bachelor farmer whose longing for a better life was stymied by forces beyond his control, leaving him, in his own words, "just existing". In this instance, the clues are carefully laid out for us: how John can't look when his mate is fussed over by his lovely mum; how the two lads' time together playing videogames or in the amusement arcade suggests a lingering boyhood; how his searing anger at Jean explodes because he wants back the mother he used to know rather than this animal embarrassment. Here's someone longing to return to the cossetting confines of childhood,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ed Guiney
Juliette Bonass

Written by

Gerard Barrett

Director of

Photography

Piers McGrail

Editor

Nathan Nugent

Production Designer

Stephanie Clerkin

Production

Sound Mixer

Hugh Fox

Costume Designer

Leonie Prendergast

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Production

Companies

An Element Pictures

production in association with
Nine Entertainment
and Bord Scannán
na hÉireann/the
Irish Film Board
Produced with the
support of investment
incentives for the
Irish Film Industry
provided by the

Government of Ireland
Developed with the
support of Bord
Scannán na hÉireann/
the Irish Film Board
and Film Four
Executive Producers
Andrew Lowe
Gerard Barrett

Cast

Jack Reynor
John
Will Poulter
Shane
Michael Smiley
Jim
Toni Collette
Jean
Harry Nagle
Kit

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor
Element Pictures
Distribution

Dublin, present day. John lives with his alcoholic mother Jean and drives a cab by night. He never knows what state Jean will be in when he returns home, and the pressure is beginning to tell. Finding her passed out in her own vomit, he has her hospitalised, and the doctor tells him that she'll die if she doesn't stop drinking immediately. She is soon back on the bottle, however, and when John visits her son Kit on his birthday, she refuses to accompany him – Kit has Down's Syndrome and is in care. Later, Jean opens up to John about how Kit's birth caused his father to leave her and plunged her into drinking to soothe the pain. John subsequently

takes her to a counselling centre run by Jim. Meanwhile John's best friend Shane is about to leave Ireland to find work abroad, unable to handle the responsibility of the son he has fathered with a casual girlfriend, though John arranges for him to see the boy before he leaves. Jim organises a month at a top clinic for Jean at a preferential rate of €8,000, and John gets the money from his crooked boss. Jean is now well on the way to turning her life around, but John finds himself ferrying a badly beaten illegal Asian immigrant to his boss as payback for the cash. Instead he delivers the immigrant into Jim's care, as yet unsure of the consequences.



That oceanic feeling: Filipe Duarte as Hugo, and Maria João Pinho as Adriana, all at sea in a glum new world

The Invisible Life

Portugal/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Vitor Gonçalves

Certificate PG 102m 40s

Reviewed by Sukhdev Sandhu

It's hard to talk about Vitor Gonçalves without mentioning time. It's been nearly 30 years since the release of his first and – until *The Invisible Life* – only film: *A Girl in Summer* (1986). With its primary colours, jaunty Andrew Poppy score and pulchritudinous young cast, it came on at first like a tribute to the *nouvelle vague*. Soon it turned into something more rueful and unsettling: a portrait of a young woman caught between the country and the city, independence and freedom, youth and maturity. Made a decade after the Carnation Revolution had put an end to authoritarian rule in Portugal, but had also ushered in years of yo-yoing between socialist reforms and IMF-mandated neoliberalism, the film captured a nation, as attractive as it is anguished, impaled between a repressive past and a liberated future that seems just beyond reach.

Few filmmakers, even those lucky enough to have been taught by the visionary director-pedagogue António Reis, would have been better placed than Gonçalves to dramatise

this impasse. His father Vasco played a key role in the 1974 revolution and was prime minister in the provisional governments that followed. However, he was soon viewed as unpredictable, longwinded, ideologically extreme. A speech in which he inveighed against those forces seeking to “place the Portuguese working class in the position of stokers for the boilers of capitalist Europe” led to his dismissal and political obscurity.

Gonçalves's own career appeared to be over not long after it had begun. *A Girl in Summer*, though often celebrated, was more cited than seen, especially outside Portugal. In the years following its release Gonçalves took over Reis's post as senior professor at Lisbon's Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema and nurtured younger directors such as João Pedro Rodrigues and Susana de Sousa Dias, but didn't direct any new work himself. Where there should have been a glittering filmography there was merely an ellipsis.

It's hard not to view *The Invisible Life* – hushed rather than declamatory, a shuffle back into the spotlight rather than a rowdy return to the fray – as a mysterious, often agonised and painfully compelling meditation on Gonçalves's extended sabbatical. It feels like a ghosted autobiography where the ghost is Gonçalves himself. (He wrote

the spare, silence-rich screenplay with Mónica Santana Baptista and Jorge Braz Santos.) Tropes familiar from the modernist canon – exhaustion, absence, incompleteness, failure – are welded to a scenario (middle-aged man going through a personal crisis) that is the stock-in-trade of many television sitcoms. Yet what results is anything but laboured or cornily conventional.

On the surface, Hugo Macedo (played by Filipe Duarte) is solidity itself: he's a civil servant of some kind (one who has few conferences to attend, deadlines to meet or digital demands on his time), fairly handsome (he's going grey but could easily model for an Italian knitwear company), and he owns an apartment that looks to be the size of a ship. And yet, when his boss António (João Perry) tells him that he's entering hospital, very possibly with a terminal illness, Hugo is immobilised. Why is unclear: the two men don't appear to have been bosom buddies, nor did António seem to act as a particularly loving father figure to his younger employee.

António's imminent death – one that was not unexpected, since he'd been treated for cancer on previous occasions – draws attention to Hugo's acedia. For some while he's acted centrifugally, a helpless spectator to his own incremental disappearance rather than a mapper of pathways. His job – its respectability, its



The film isolates and illuminates a suspicion, which more and more Europeans have, that a golden age has passed



Mourning and melancholia: João Perry as António

becalmed office rhythms – has been a partial mask; it has thwarted a self-introspection that would likely have been useless. For Gonçalves, knowledge is not power, talking is not a cure, the road to redemption does not exist.

At the movies, whenever there's a man with a malaise, there's usually a lovely young woman offering her comely self as a solution. For a while it seems as though Adriana (Maria João Pinho) might be that woman. She and Hugo have a past. She had hoped to become an architect; now she's an air hostess. In some ways she has been stymied and compromised. She comes back into his life, goes out, comes back in. The jolt she supplies, the possibility of an alternative ending – doesn't last. "I can't hide myself from life like you, Hugo," she tells him.

"I liked the empty corridor," Hugo muses early on. "The distant noises... losing track of time." His workplace, centrally located and gracefully designed, represents yesterday's architecture, an old social and economic order that now has only vestigial potency. There are repeated shots of Lisbon's Praça do Comércio – Commerce Square – which was completely rebuilt after the 1755 earthquake, witnessed the assassination of the king of Portugal in 1908, and was the place where thousands of locals congregated in 1974 during the overthrow of the dictatorship. Its history of change – and its present makeover (it's shown being dug up and landscaped anew) – is a reproach to the genteel ossification lived out by nearby government officials.

Throughout *The Invisible Life*, Gonçalves deploys relatively tight shots to draw attention to Hugo's ever-decreasing circles. At work, a mood of discreet downsizing prevails; the floor above him has been emptied, and his may be the next to go. His own house is large but he occupies only a fraction of it. The aquarium there has no fish. The whole place is a stage-set lacking performers. He's often shown looking out of windows, though it's unclear whether he ever sees anything. His is a darkened inscape, a vespertine realm of closed blinds and dimmed stairwells.

The only antidote is the dreamy 8mm sequences (shot by Julie Brook) that punctuate the film at regular intervals. Supersaturated, hazy, rather mysterious, they depict broad-masted ships sailing across blue seas, dramatic cliff faces, golden horizons. Their significance is spelled out rather unnecessarily towards the close: the characters are diagnosed or

self-diagnose with a lucidity that, because it contradicts the exquisitely cultivated fuzz of ambiguity beforehand, feels peremptory.

It's tempting to imagine the luminous forensics and precisely timed emotional detonations that Nuri Bilge Ceylan would have brought to this material. In some ways, *The Invisible Life* suggests a more internalised, less expressionistic version of Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011), another film brimming with a deeply affecting sense of the limits of agency.

It's also tempting to treat as essentially autobiographical this story of a mentee unable to move forward and create anything after the death of his mentor. But that would be to ignore its broader resonances. Almost inevitably, Gonçalves's portrayal of siltage and sedimentation, of the subtle atrophy from which Portugal's middle-class burghers are powerless to break free, brings to mind the austerity measures lately adopted by that nation, to say nothing of the resulting spike in unemployment, bankruptcies and wage cuts.

The film also isolates and hauntingly illuminates a suspicion, which more and more Europeans have, that a golden age – anchored, vaguely paternalist, unproductive by modern standards, one they would never have thought to identify as such – has passed. How do older men and women, weaned on those certainties, cope and adapt? Will the future be one of mourning and melancholia? *The Invisible Life*, though it may seem bashful and almost hermetic, asks raw, unsettling questions of us all. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Pedro Fernandes Duarte
Rui Alexandre Santos
Maria João Sigalho
Christopher Young

Written by

Vitor Gonçalves
Mónica Santana Baptista
Jorge Braz Santos

Director of Photography

Leonardo Simões
Super 8 imagery courtesy of Julie Brook

Editors

Rodrigo Pereira
Rui Alexandre Santos

Art Director

Patrícia Maravilha

Music

Composed by Sinan C. Savaskan
Sound Recordist Ricardo Garihaio

Wardrobe

Silvia Siopa
Paula Guerreiro

Production Companies

Rosa Filmes and Young Films
present a film by Vitor Gonçalves
Film supported by MC/ICA
Co-financed by RTP - Radiotelevisão Portuguesa
with the support of Câmara Municipal de Lisboa and Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

Cast

Filipe Duarte
Hugo Macedo
João Perry

António

Maria João Pinho
Adriana
Pedro Lamares
Sandro
Susana Arrais
Paula
Maria Ana Bernauer

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[1.66:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Independent Cinema Office

Portuguese theatrical title

A vida invisível

Lisbon, the present. Hugo, a middle-aged civil servant, is called into the office of his boss António and informed that António is going to hospital to receive treatment for cancer. Hugo, who lives alone and regards António as something of a mentor, is downcast and beset by anxiety and lassitude. His ex-girlfriend Adriana visits and he tries – desultorily and unsuccessfully – to resume his relationship with her. António makes him his legatee. After António's death, Hugo visits his home to go through his effects and finds a collection of 8mm footage featuring wordless images of seas, cliffs and horizons. He puzzles over these and is moved by them. At work he nearly throttles a co-worker who, he feels, has been insufficiently respectful towards his deceased friend. He loses his job. He realises that the 8mm films represented an imaginative search for new horizons as well as for Adriana. He realises too that he is like António and shares his fundamental isolation.



There is nothing like a Dane: Viggo Mortensen as Captain Dinesen

Jauja

Argentina/USA/Mexico/France/Denmark/
The Netherlands/Germany/Brazil 2014

Director: Lisandro Alonso

Certificate 15 109m 58s

See Feature
on page 18

Reviewed by Adrian Martin

Although at first glance *Jauja* seem largely plotless, with only a few major narrative moves, this impression is deceptive. In the film's striking

opening tableau, every detail, however casual, will play a crucial role in what is to follow. In 19th-century Patagonia, Captain Dinesen is a Danish engineer on a quest to find Jauja, a mythical land of happiness and plenty; he sits in a stiff suit, facing away from us and leaning close to his daughter Ingeborg, who is turned towards the camera. Ingeborg speaks of her desire to own a dog – one that will follow her everywhere, that will live only for her. And what does Dinesen become, 30 minutes into the film, but precisely that, abandoning his mission in a heartbeat and blindly following her every trace.

This isn't simply a matter of director Lisandro Alonso using, across several moments of his film, a pointed dramatic metaphor, or flagging

up an ironic analogy. For there will be other, real dogs glimpsed on screen – one of which leads Dinesen to a cave where (in a beguiling rhyme with Christopher Nolan's blockbuster *Interstellar*) lives a woman who might well be the elderly incarnation of his daughter – and there is even another Ingeborg, now rechristened Viilbjørk (also the first name of the actress playing her), shown as a character in contemporary times. One of Viilbjørk's dogs, it transpires, has a nasty 'nervous ailment' – brought on by the fact that its young mistress disappears for long stretches of time.

The film takes shape within the poetic



The man with no name: Misael Saavedra

flux of these strange, inscrutable shifts and metamorphoses. In what is a bold step in his career, Alonso (*La libertad*, *Liverpool*) reaches well beyond the neo-neorealism often associated with the Slow Cinema movement, to shape (with co-writer Fabian Casas, a poet and novelist) an elusive, dreamlike amalgam of diverse times, levels and encounters. While still employing the steady, dispassionate, contemplative camera-eye (and microphone-ear) of his earlier work, Alonso takes *Jauja* more in the direction of Apichatpong Weerasethakul's films, or Miguel Gomes's celebrated *Tabu* (2012) – a type of cinema in which the materiality of landscapes and political histories is melded with the magical, transformative elements of fairytale and myth.

Alonso has developed his art and craft where certain of his contemporaries, such as Lav Diaz, have not. *Jauja* is a film that (in David Lynch's useful expression) really 'works the frame' – and what a captivatingly rare 1.33:1 ratio that frame is, with its rounded, unmatted corners. Departing far from naturalism, Alonso's *mise en scène* systematically deploys large intervals of distance between his 'figures in the landscape' or, inversely, comically jams them all together in the one static set-up; with Aki Kaurismäki's cinematographer Timo Salminen, he explores a rich, intoxicating colour palette; and even the

conventional 'match cut on action' becomes – in the extreme way it is arranged here – like a rude bump from one world into another.

It is easy to be misled by *Jauja*'s opening intertitle text, which suggests a robust, epic tale of male adventurers searching for a New World – and losing their way, as all explorers of an impossible utopia tend to do. But this is no return to *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972) territory. Alonso ruthlessly – and often humorously – minimises the traditional panoply of explorer tales: there are no perilous sea voyages, no treks up steep mountains, and hardly a single discernible scrape with the indigenous people of the region – those "coconut heads" who Dinesen's colleague Pittaluga advises must be entirely exterminated. Indeed, Alonso's staging of specific, sparse, incongruous configurations of nature and technological culture – such as the sight of a man in a vast field clumsily wielding a surveying instrument – recalls moments in Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978), where colourful details of 'period costume' and historical props played a similarly excessive, sticking-out-like-a-sore-thumb role. The Argentinian critic Quintín has, in this light, pointed to the large, complex "offscreen space" of *Jauja*: a conflicted sense of national identity torn between romantic, nostalgic longing for the figure of the *gaucho* and a no less intense cultivation of European culture and manners (a tension we amply see, for example, in Jorge Luis Borges's writings).

Fourteen years ago, at the moment of his debut feature, Alonso was the furthest thing imaginable from a 'cinophile filmmaker' like Gomes or Leos Carax – I vividly remember his anger at critics who endlessly compared his style with that of Chantal Akerman, whose films, at that time, he had not even seen, let alone chosen to emulate. Although he has doubtless imbibed his fair share of international film culture in the period since, Alonso remains a director not given to the postmodern, 'mannerist' affection for specific filmic quotations or pastiches. Notwithstanding this fact, *Jauja* enters into an extremely rich, flowing, unforced dialogue with certain key forms and traditions in cinema history.

For example, there is the western genre – especially in its best-known, American variety. Dinesen's obsessive hunt for his daughter cannot



Horse opera: *Jauja* echoes John Ford's *The Searchers*

help but recall the quest of Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) to find young Debbie (Natalie Wood) in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). Many critics have compared Alonso's picturing of the Patagonian landscape to Ford's images of Monument Valley and the like. But, beyond surface plot and setting, Alonso here takes us to the core of the western (and, indeed, of *The Searchers*), no matter where it plays or how it is recreated: *Jauja* explores the thin veneer of a civilisation yet to be solidified, a civilisation that is little more than the ambiguous flux of animal and human,

'Jauja' explores the thin veneer of a civilisation that is little more than the ambiguous flux of animal and human, tame and savage

tame and savage, the desired and the repressed. Hence the hint of incestuous feeling between father and daughter (incest was already a topic hovering over *Liverpool*) – a feeling imperfectly 'contained' by morality or law, and hence feeding (or 'devouring', to use a recurrent word here) all reality with its force of fantasy. For all its evocation of the 'classical' western, *Jauja* also, at moments, conjures a chilled-out Alejandro Jodorowsky – less obviously surrealistic but no less provocative in its core propositions.

The casting of Viggo Mortensen is especially apt on this level. Apart from the subtle skill he brings to the project – setting his character apart from the rest through a small-scale set of nervy, histrionic tics and glances – he also embodies, in cinematic memory, a fascinating series of western or quasi-western hero/antihero figures from films such as the underrated *Hidalgo* (2004) and Ed Harris's *Appaloosa* (2008) through to his richly ambiguous role in Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* (2005), another film that echoes, in key details, *The Searchers*.

What is most remarkable in *Jauja*, however, is the way it engineers a slow swerve away from an initially – even oppressively – male genre-cluster (adventure plus western) to become wholly, finally, the vivid phantasm of a young girl (and hence something akin to surreal, Buñuelian melodrama, like Valeria Sarmiento's *Our Marriage*, 1984). In the ultimate shift from past to present and from dream to reality, Alonso is not presenting us with a narrative puzzle to be clarified, solved and thus swiftly exhausted by its viewers. Although comparisons as diverse as De Palma's *Femme Fatale* (2002), Lynch's *Inland Empire* (2006) and Teresa Villaverde's *Transe* (2006) will spring to a cinephilic mind, *Jauja* is closer to the militantly unsolvable riddle of Pasolini's *Oedipus Rex* (1967) – another film about a precarious civilisation with a dark, ever-living undertow of barbaric myth. When Alonso and Pasolini starkly cut or dissolve between different planes of historical time and society, they are not groping for banal 'explanations' of a storytelling mystery; it is their way of excavating, ever deeper, the enigmas of reality. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Viggo Mortensen
Ilse Hughan
Sylvie Pialat
Jaime Romandia
Andy Kleinman
Helle Ulsteen
Michael Weber
Ezequiel Borovinsky
Leandro Pugliese

Screenplay

Fabian Casas
Lisandro Alonso

Director of Photography

Timo Salminen

Editors

Natalia López
Gonzalo del Val

Art Director

Sebastián Roses

Original Music

Viggo Mortensen

Sound

Catriel Vildosola

Costume Designer

Gabriela Aurora

Fernández

Producciones,

Les Films du
Worso, Kamoli
Films, Massive,
Fortuna Films

Production Companies

4L, Perceval Pictures,
Fortuna Films, Les
Films du Worso,

Mantarraya, Massive,
Kamoli Films, The
Match Factory,

Wanka with the
support of INCAA
in co-production
with Canal Brasil,

Bananeira Filmes
With the participation
of Le Pacte with the
support of CNC -

Cinéma du Monde,
Ministère des Affaires,
Institute Français
in association with

Arte - Cofinova 9

Arte - Cofinova 9

Arte - Cofinova 9

Arte - Cofinova 9

Arte - Cofinova 9

Arte - Cofinova 9

Arte - Cofinova 9

Dinesen

Vilbjørk Malling
Agger

Ingeborg Dinesen/
Vilbjørk

Ghita Nørby
woman in cave

Adrián Fondari
Lieutenant Pittaluga

Esteban Bigliardi
Angel Milkibar

Diego Román
Corto

Mariano Arce
Birrita

Misael Saavedra
Indian, no name

Gabriel Márquez
Colonel Zuluaga

Brian Patterson
dog man

In Colour
[1.33:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Soda Pictures

Patagonia, late 19th century. Captain Dinesen is a Danish engineer who, with a small band of men (Pittaluga, Birrita, Angel and Corto) is searching for *Jauja*, a mythological land of abundance and happiness. In particular, the men are looking for any trace of the renegade Colonel Zuluaga, now said to be a roaming bandit dressed in women's clothing. Dinesen is fiercely protective of his teenage daughter Ingeborg; they share a tent, and he keeps her separate from the others as much as possible. Ingeborg has, however, initiated an affair with Corto, and together they flee into the wild. Dinesen abandons the quest for *Jauja* and searches for Ingeborg. In his travels, he finds an unidentified mutilated corpse and then a dying Corto – both victims of Zuluaga, who has taken Ingeborg captive. Dinesen is shot at. He eventually comes upon an elderly woman in a cave, who lives proudly with her dogs and speaks of her youthful dream of escaping society and going into the desert. She hands Dinesen a compass that Ingeborg earlier took from the explorers' camp.

Denmark, present day. Vilbjørk, who is identical to Ingeborg, awakens in a castle. She converses with the man who looks after her dogs, one of which is neurotically injuring itself. She finds a toy soldier, glimpsed earlier in the film, and discards it in a pool of water. We see, one last time, the landscape of the past.

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Pictures, Mantarraya

Cast

Viggo Mortensen
Captain Gunnar

Amar Akbar & Tony

United Kingdom 2013
Director: Atul Malhotra

Reviewed by Sophia Satchell Baeza

At the heart of Atul Malhotra's debut feature, which centres on the comic and romantic exploits of three friends in multicultural London, is an elaborate 'three men walk into a bar' joke: a Sikh, a Muslim and a Catholic walk into a series of improbable, ham-fisted antics set in and around the borough of Hounslow, or 'the Punjab of London' as the script refers to it.

The film is loosely based on Manmohan Desai's 1970s Bollywood comedy *Amar Akbar Anthony*, about three brothers separated through circumstance. Transposing this idea on to an urban extended-family network is a strong working principle. Unfortunately, the film veers confusingly between buddy comedy, high camp, urban violence and family drama without ever committing to one particular tone.

Nevertheless, there are some entertaining visual set pieces, propelled by Rishi Rich's superb high-energy soundtrack. In a pleasingly tasteless dream sequence unfolding in an Indian marriage bureau, Tony (Martin Delaney) fantasises about the latex-clad woman of his dreams rolling chapattis to the strains of 'Ave Maria'. And strong performances from Meera Syal and Nina Wadia briefly realise the film's comic potential.

If there is a moral here, it's one of tolerance, perseverance and friendship. Regrettably, this is undone by a faltering delivery. To misquote Frank Carson, it's the way you tell 'em. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Sandeep Puri
Victoria J Wood
Atul Malhotra
Written by
Atul Malhotra
Director of
Photography
Jorge Luengas
Editors
Alex Morgan
Gareth Blower
Production Design
Damien Creagh
Music
Rishi Rich
Sound
Alan O Duffy
Costume Designer
Julie Jones

©AAT Films Limited
Production
Companies
Sash Media presents
in association with
Axworks Films a film
by Atul Malhotra
Executive
Producers
Esther Randall
Rohit Kumar

Cast
Rez Kempton
Amar
Sam Vincenti
Akbar
Martin Delaney
Tony
Karen David
Meera
Laura Aikman
Samantha
Goldy Notay
Sonia
Tanveer Ghani
Uncle Jay
Dev Sagoo
Mr Singh
Amrita Acharia
Richa
Mannira Rekhi
Nita
Munir Khairdin
Southall Sanj
Meera Syal
Honey
Nina Wadia
Seema
Mark Moraghan
George Williams
Ace Bhatti
Doctor Kumar
In Colour

[L85:1]

Distributor
Sash Media Ltd

Hounslow, London, present day. Childhood friends Amar, Akbar and Tony are infatuated with local beauty Nita. Permanently chaperoned by her violent brother Sanj, Nita proves impossible to approach. When Tony finally manages to speak to her, a series of threatening altercations ensues, culminating in a fight in a nightclub toilet, where Amar stabs Sanj to protect Tony.

Sometime later, Amar leaves prison and faces the task of rebuilding his life.

Argerich

Switzerland/France/Estonia/Slovenia/Australia/Sweden/Poland/Finland 2012
Director: Stéphanie Argerich
Certificate PG 99m 49s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

At the beginning of this documentary, its director Stéphanie Argerich is in the process of giving birth, with her mother Martha – the film's main subject – hovering nearby. "She always says girls are more interesting," Stéphanie's voiceover observes, just as the child is born – and revealed to be a boy. There are many such moments – barbed but poignant, redolent of both amused intimacy and a pained sense of disconnection – in Stéphanie's portrait of Martha, which is at once an account of a startlingly eventful artistic life and an effort to make sense of the peculiar attitude to parenting it has engendered.

Born in Buenos Aires in 1941, Martha Argerich played her first concert at the age of eight, and has gone on to be regarded as one of the world's great pianists, particularly fêted for her interpretation of Chopin. She has three daughters, of whom Stéphanie is the second, and while all clearly adore her – "I am the daughter of a goddess," Stéphanie observes at one point, with only a shade of sarcasm – she is a mother of mercurial moods and ambiguous impact.

It's clear that the ambivalence cuts both ways. Cyril Connolly may have claimed it was the pram in the hall that most reliably damned an artist's chances, but to Martha the negative impact of parenthood on creativity made itself apparent prior to the birth: a recording of her playing while pregnant, she tells Stéphanie, almost reduced her to tears because it sounded to her "like a pregnant housewife". Not "suggestive", she explains, not "demonic". The foetus so draining its parent of fire was Stéphanie.

The way Martha relates this tale – dramatically, with many a pout and a toss of the hair; self-aggrandisingly, with a casual aside that "it's one of my most popular records"; bluntly, with little apparent concern for how Stéphanie might feel – is typical of the woman the film constructs, someone who is certainly suggestive and perhaps a tad demonic. A stunner in her youth, Martha remains beautiful at 70, while her stormy moods and self-obsession approach a parody of the behaviour of a difficult genius. Yet a film that starts out feeling uncomfortably like a public therapy session – bitter jabs at a



Motherwise engaged: Martha Argerich

swollen maternal ego – deepens as it goes, into a nuanced examination of how familial life interacts with the obsessiveness of a true artist, and how intimate one can be with someone whose ways of loving are complex to say the least.

One of Stéphanie's childhood memories is that of her mother leaving the train during long journeys – for a smoke or a coffee – between concerts, and fearing that she would not return in time. "I think she enjoyed giving me these little frights," she breezily reports, "like a cat playing with a mouse." More unsettling still is the life story of Stéphanie's older half-sister Lyda, who was left in a children's home and then with foster parents while her father, composer Robert Chen, and Argerich both pursued their musical careers.

The gentleness with which Stéphanie allows these matters to come to light is to the great credit of her film (which is receiving a belated UK release, having first screened in 2012). Technically, it's a home movie all the way, with poor light and wobbles everywhere; but Stéphanie has a real filmmaker's feel for clever resonances and subtle underlinings. Just as the emotional story and the biography are both part-told, letting the audience fill in the gaps, so the documentary allows visual hints to fill out the gaps in what we are being told. This film tells only part of an extraordinary story, but does so with a consistently interesting mix of tenderness and force. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Luc Peter
Aline Schmid
Pierre-Olivier Bardet
Claire Lion
Cinematography
Stéphanie Argerich
Luc Peter
Editing
Vincent Plass
Sound
Marc Von Sturler

©Intermezzo Films,
Idéale Audience, ARTE
France, RTS, SRF
Production
Companies
Intermezzo Films,
Idéale Audience
Co-producers: RTS,
SRF, ARTE France
With the participation
of France Télévisions
- Unité Musique et

Spectacles vivants,
MEZZO, ERR – Eesti
Rahvusringhääling,
RTS – Radio Televizija
Slovenija, SBS –
Special Broadcasting
Service, SVT –
Sveriges Television,
TVP Kultura
– Telewizja Polska,
YLE – Yleisradio Oy
and the help of Office
fédéral de la Culture
(DFI), Fonds Régio
Films, La Loterie
Romande, Ville de
Genève, Fondation
Vaudoise pour le
Cinéma - Loterie
Romande, Canton
de Vaud et Ville de
Lausanne Fonds
de production
télévisuelle, Succès
Passage Antenne,

La Fondation Ernst
Göhner - Stage Pool
Focal, Cinéforum,
Swiss Films, Centre
national du cinéma
et de l'image animée,
PROCIREP – Société
des Auteurs, ANGOA.
With the support
of the Programme
Media de la
Communauté
Européenne

voice-over
Stéphanie Argerich

In Colour
[L78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

Filmed over two decades, this documentary begins in Geneva, as the film's director Stéphanie Argerich gives birth to a son; her mother, the concert pianist Martha Argerich, is present at the birth. Martha speaks to Stéphanie about her own experience of pregnancy and motherhood.

Stéphanie follows her mother to foreign concerts while reminiscing about their travels together during her childhood. Preparing for concerts in Poland and Japan, Martha is panicky and morose. With archive footage as illustration, Stéphanie relates her mother's complex life and career history; she also speaks with her half-sisters, Lyda Chen and Annie Dutoit, about their memories of family life. She travels to her mother's native Argentina and explores her grandfather's archives of photographs and belongings. She also visits her father, American pianist Stephen Kovacevich, and pursues a 16-year process of trying to have him legally recognise her as his child. Martha celebrates her 70th birthday and discusses her feelings about it with all three of her daughters.

Au revoir l'été

Japan 2013
Director: Fukada Koji
Certificate 12A 125m 36s



Seaside effects: Nikaido Fumi

See interview
on page 11

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

The foreign-release title for this Japanese film makes director Fukada Koji's allegiances pretty clear: the cinema of Eric Rohmer, and specifically Rohmer's

1996 *Conte d'été* (*A Summer's Tale*), another tale of beaches, intersecting lives and young holiday romance that basks in soft focus and irresolution. This gentle drama set in provincial Japan has a few barbs that you wouldn't find in the French master, however – the radioactive pall of Fukushima is never far away, and the central presence of an illegal by-the-hour sex hotel (or 'love hotel', as such things are euphemistically called in Asia) provides the motor for some of the narrative. The single burst of grubby commercial sex, shot in lollipop colours towards the latter part of the film, is also something you wouldn't expect in Rohmer, though in this instance, *sans* the grubby aspect, perhaps that other French summer film of 1996

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Sugino Kiki

Writer

Fukada Koji

Director of

Photography

Negishi Kenichi

Editor

Fukada Koji

Film Score

Jo Keita

Sound Recorders

Chinso Son

Yoshikata Junji

Costume

Araki Satoe

© Sakuko Film

Partners

Production

Companies

Wa Entertainment,

Lette, Atom-X

presents

Executive

Producers

Ono Kousuke

Adachi Makoto

Miyata Mikio

Cast

Nikaido Fumi

Sakuko

Tsuruta Mayu

Mikie

Taiga

Takashi

Furutachi Kanji

Ukichi

Tadashi Ohtake

Nishida

Koshino Ena

Chika

Watanabe Makiko

Mizuho

Matsuda Hiroko

Toshie

In Colour

[1.33:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Day For Night

Japanese

theatrical title

Hotori no Sakuko

Japan, present day. Over a few weeks in late August, young student Sakuko and her aunt Mikie house-sit in a seaside town. Sakuko has failed her entrance exam to university and is reluctant to return to her studies. Mikie's former boyfriend Ukichi manages a local 'love hotel'. Sakuko becomes interested in Ukichi's nephew Takashi, who was evacuated from Fukushima following 2011's nuclear disaster. At an anti-nuclear demonstration, Takashi says that he doesn't like Fukushima, and doesn't want to go back. Sacked from the love hotel following an outburst, he spends a night walking with Sakuko. She resolves to study for her university exam, and happily takes the train back to Tokyo.

comes to mind – François Ozon's *Une robe d'été*.

Our heroine Sakuko (Nikaido Fumi) is a young student spending the summer holidays with her aunt at the house of another relative; her aunt is finishing writing a book and talks longingly of Indonesia, a motif highlighted by the pervasive gamelan music throughout the film. Sakuko is deflated because she has failed to get into university and is at a crucial crossroads in her life, wanting to be irresponsible and flee but at the same time keen to get back to work.

Sakuko's personal melodrama is worked out through a chaste relationship with a young man employed at the nearby love hotel. His name is Takashi and the film is as much about him as it is about Sakuko. Indeed, he provides most of the action in the movie – for instance reacting so strongly to the presence of an ageing local businessman with an underage girl in the hotel that he is sacked. Or, in one great scene, being invited by an anti-nuclear demonstration to speak on a podium and, rather than toeing the line, blurting out how much he hates Fukushima anyway. There's more attention to costume than you usually see in Japanese pictures of this kind – the film is full of the kind of floaty summer dresses that Ozon would be happy to put on his male characters.

There are various figures who come and go, and various liaisons take place among the secondary characters. Much time is spent walking, cycling or measuring out life in coffee spoons in dowdy provincial cafés. When the sun comes out, the landscape is magical – full of the musical buzz of insects and a sense of heat. The beach, though, has nothing on Rohmer's *Dinard* – a few days of overcast shooting have moderated any sense of an idyll, which is probably no bad thing. The final scene is one of mighty resolution – Sakuko's aunt has finished her book (the announcement of this fact results in niece and aunt bowing to each other) and waves Sakuko off on a train back to Tokyo. Sakuko is calm and resolved, her hair pulled back to make her look youthful and focused, now thinking of a bigger picture.

A film of some delicacy and charm, well served by the two leads (Nikaido is a Miike Takashi alum who usually appears in more commercial fare), *Au revoir l'été* is a noble calling-card for writer-director Fukada. If he can marry his skill at framing shots and directing actors with a slightly better script, he could become a very good director indeed. **6**

Bypass

Director: Duane Hopkins

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

"You're going to be a dad," says Lily (Charlotte Spencer) to her high-school boyfriend Tim (George MacKay) about halfway through *Bypass*. It's an unexpected bit of news that goes down like a lead balloon with Tim, who admittedly doesn't exactly have the best male role models to draw on. His own father is long since out of the picture, while his older brother Greg (Benjamin Dilloway) has recently been paroled after serving a prison sentence for burglary. With these precedents, it's no wonder that the kid is cagey about parenthood. And yet the irony is that in Greg's absence, and following the death of his mother from a mysterious illness, Tim has already become the man of the house, and it's killing him one panic attack at a time.

Tim's fragility is signalled early and often in *Bypass*, and there's a sense of piling-on in the film that's somewhere between effective and excessive. By sticking poor Tim in the middle of several impossible situations and watching him squirm – quite literally, when he's felled by full-body seizures – writer-director Duane Hopkins (who turned heads back in 2008 with *Better Things*) is making a statement about a British social safety net ripped open at the bottom. He's also staking his claim to a national filmmaking tradition steeped in bleakness. But there's a difference between practising kitchen-sink realism and heaving everything but the kitchen sink at your main character. And it's not just heavy life obstacles that are flying at Tim from every angle. It's the lightweight HD camera as well.

MacKay, who was last seen in *Pride*, is a solid, resourceful actor, and it's very much to his credit that he never once gives the impression of a slumming young star, instead diving inside Tim's anxiety as David Procter's cinematography gets in his face and turns showy curlicues all around him. It's definitely possible for the tension between a fine, understated lead performance and an overly aggressive visual style to result in an interesting film: one recent example would be Yann Demange's *'71*. However, in *Bypass* you



Fate expectations: George MacKay

feel that MacKay is almost being assaulted by the filmmaking, which flits between bruised naturalism and blurry abstraction. It's virtuosic, albeit in a way that highlights Hopkins's artistic ambitions rather than heightening the drama of Tim's descent into the same criminal lifestyle that has rotted much of his family tree.

Hopkins's script is probably the film's weakest element. The dialogue is blunt and prosaic beneath the actors' strenuously everyday cadences, and the plot points are fuzzy, especially when it comes to the gang who employ Tim – only semi-believably – to do a little bit of dirty work on the side. There are also some very on-the-nose metaphors, such as a shot of a fox crouched in a clearing that seems to embody Tim's hunted, haunted conscience (suffice to say that Lars von Trier did more with a similar critter in *Antichrist*). As a showcase for its still-up-and-coming director and on-the-verge star, *Bypass* is presentable enough, but as drama, it's over-cranked and underwhelming. **Ⓢ**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Samm Hallay	Factory, SVT and Illuminations Films	Arabella Arnott mum
Written by Duane Hopkins	In co-production with Plattform Produktion and Film I Vast	In Colour [1.78:1]
Director of Photography David Procter	Funded by Torino Film Lab	Distributor Third Films
Editor Chris Barwell	Ffilm Cymru Wales	
Production Designer Stéphane Collonge	Executive Producers Keith Griffiths Christopher Collins Keith Potter Ed Talfan	
Music Saunders Jurriaans Danny Bersi	Cast George MacKay Tim Charlotte Spencer Lily Benjamin Dillaway Greg Donald Sumpter grandfather Matt Cross Lester Lara Peake Helen	
Supervising Sound Editor Joakim Sundström		
Production Companies BFI, Film I Vast and Screen Agency Wales present a Duane Hopkins film A Third Films production in association with Severn Screen, The Match		

Gateshead, the present. After being arrested for burglary, Greg is sentenced to 18 months in prison. During his absence, his mother dies and his younger brother Tim cares for their sister Helen. Tim is hesitant to follow his brother into a life of crime, though he sells stolen goods to make ends meet and to prevent social services taking Helen into care. Greg's friend Lester asks Tim if he wants to take on bigger jobs robbing houses, but Tim declines; his girlfriend Lily warns him to be careful around Lester. Tim begins suffering from migraines and vomiting, but keeps his symptoms to himself. Lily tells him that she's pregnant; he replies that he's not ready to be a father. Tim visits the doctor, who suggests that he be admitted to hospital. While carrying drugs and cash for his boss, Tim is robbed at gunpoint. Greg, now out of prison, tells him to take a job from Lester. Tim and Greg rob a house and when Lester tries to cheat them, Greg knocks him out and takes his money. After driving away in a stolen car, they're pursued by police. Tim escapes and returns home; the next morning he goes to see Lily. He has a vision of his mother, and realises that in fact he's near death in the hospital. He recovers. Sometime later, Tim and Lily have their baby.

Chappie

USA 2015

Director: Neill Blomkamp

Certificate 15 120m 11s

Reviewed by Tim Hayes

The best bits of Neill Blomkamp's memorable feature debut *District 9* (2009) caught some of Paul Verhoeven's instinct for social conflict and its parallel bodily ruptures. Now *Chappie* finds Blomkamp complimenting the Dutchman as he might a favourite uncle. Chappie himself is a law-enforcement 'Scout, a visual cousin of the robots that appeared in Blomkamp's *Elysium* (2013), as the director continues to plunder an ideas-bank of prior shorts and sketches – though the Scouts here bark the slightly mangled catchphrases of a malaprop RoboCop. The armed robot Moose, a lumbering juggernaut, is explicitly designed to summon up the spirit of that movie's ED-209 and filmed accordingly – although it also flies, which might bring the battlesuit piloted by Vernon Wells in Joe Dante's *Innerspace* (1987) into the picture too.

Chappie duly finds Blomkamp in a not unfamiliar bind, returning to the notionally smaller-scale arena of his original Johannesburg stamping ground with licence to indulge his genre credentials, while simultaneously locked into a fairly predictable uptick in ballistic mayhem and the unleashing of Hans Zimmer on the soundtrack. The result seems a zero-sum game. Sharlto Copley's motion-captured incarnation of Chappie is as lively a piece of mime as you could wish for – Blomkamp milks his creation's childlike naivety and those expressive bunny ears – but the director's rather bland characterisations of bureaucratic malice are starting to suffer from diminishing returns. The exception should be Hugh Jackman's wildly exaggerated bad guy Vincent, overcompensating for who knows what exactly in a shorts, mullet and handgun combo. However, having planted the idea that Vincent is a Christian who crosses himself before unleashing hell, the film has no time or inclination to interrogate the implications.

The most significant sign of indulgence, and presumably also of Blomkamp's clout, is in finding lead roles for musicians of his



It's a scare cop: Chappie

acquaintance from the South African group Die Antwoord. Any theory that Ninja and Yolandi Visser (who have the same names as their characters) aren't engaged in much in the way of acting rather ignores the practised intensity with which they are most definitively playing Die Antwoord. They both get more of an arc than Dev Patel as Chappie's creator Deon, or Sigourney Weaver as Deon's boss Michelle, and Blomkamp's affection for the pair is palpable – certainly more apparent than Harmony Korine's was in the short *Umshini Wam* (2011).

The puckish disruption of a potentially rote screen experience through some off-kilter casting seems a fair example of the director's inclinations – but in this context it's a sign of trouble brewing too. Social commentators with Blomkamp's vigour don't germinate in mainstream cinema very often, and the pressures to play down matters of innate human complexity and instead lean into cartoon corporate venality measured in rounds per minute are considerable. Giving Blomkamp his head in matters of casting and genial in-jokery seems to have achieved the undesired effect, so perhaps some greater collaboration and a venture beyond established territory is now called for. Somewhere out there lurks the producer to play Alan Marshall to Blomkamp's Verhoeven, just waiting for karma to bring them together. Your move, fate. **Ⓢ**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Neill Blomkamp Simon Kinberg	Production Designer Jules Cook	Film Corporation and MRC II Distribution	Department of Trade and Industry South Africa	Yo-Landi Vi\$Ser Yo-Landi	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Written by Neill Blomkamp Terri Tatchell	Music Hans Zimmer	Company LP	Executive Producer Ben Waisbren	Jose Pablo Cantillo Yankie (Amerika)	Distributor Sony Pictures Releasing UK
Director of Photography Trent Opaloch	Production Ken Saville	Production Companies Columbia Pictures and MRC present in association with LStar		Brandon Auret Hippo	
Editors Julian Clarke Mark Goldblatt	Sound Mixer Diana Cilliers	Capital a Kinberg Genre production Produced with the assistance of the		Sigourney Weaver Michelle Bradley Hugh Jackman Vincent Moore Ninja Ninja	
	Costume Designer Diana Cilliers		Cast Sharlto Copley Chappie Dev Patel Deon Wilson		

Johannesburg, an alternative present. The Tetraavaal corporation supplies law-enforcement robots, known as Scouts, to the city police force. The robots can carry out only basic tasks, but Tetraavaal employee Deon has been secretly developing an AI system that might provide a Scout with authentic consciousness. Vincent, an antagonistic co-worker, wants to deploy instead a heavily armed robot known as Moose, though company executive Michelle is resistant. Deon installs his AI system into a damaged Scout, creating a sentient robot with the mind of a child and a five-day lifespan.

Deon and the robot fall into the hands of a street gang. Yolandi, girlfriend of gang member Ninja, names

the robot Chappie. Ninja intends to use Chappie in a robbery, but an emotional bond begins to develop between Yolandi and Chappie. Vincent learns what has happened and remotely deactivates all the Scouts, including Chappie. As crime in the city spirals out of control, he persuades Michelle to deploy Moose and uses it to destroy the gang's hideout, killing Yolandi. A reactivated but ailing Chappie destroys Moose and returns to Tetraavaal with a mortally wounded Deon. Vincent is defeated. Chappie and Deon transfer their minds into new Scout bodies and escape into the city. Ninja discovers a chip containing a record of Yolandi's consciousness, which she and Chappie had made earlier.

Cobain Montage of Heck

Director: Brett Morgen
Certificate 15 132m 17s

Reviewed by Sam Davies

Pop time runs differently to clock time; it's elastic, stretching like blown bubble gum and imploding to nothing. It hardly seems possible that Nirvana was in the wider public consciousness for barely two-and-a-half years before singer-guitarist Kurt Cobain's death in 1994. The two decades since seem at the same time like nothing – the language of rock music has barely moved on in the meantime, instead regressing and digressing – and also like a lifetime. For a band so intent on vandalising the safe consensus of mainstream pop culture to become so huge today is all but unimaginable.

At one point in Brett Morgen's *Cobain: Montage of Heck*, Kurt Cobain's mother describes the fear she felt as she listened to an advance copy of the band's major-label debut *Nevermind*. She was afraid, she explains, because she knew what was coming next (megastardom). It's easier to believe, though, that she was responding to the sheer violence that poured out of Cobain and bandmates Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic. Cobain dreamed of being a neighbourhood threat: as Morgen reveals, Jonathan Kaplan's *Over the Edge* (1979), in which a town's teenage population lock their parents in the high-school gym and run amok, was one of his favourite films.

Montage of Heck is the first film project about the singer to have the full cooperation of his family and widow Courtney Love, and Morgen takes maximum advantage. It swims with family photographs and home movies, capturing Cobain as tow-headed toddler, unable to switch off a hyperactive mind, and as gangly adolescent, still pre-punk and freshly shampooed in baseball tees and bell-bottoms. Interviews with Cobain's mother and father map out the complex currents of guilt, shame and rejection their divorce set off, with the teenage Kurt pinballing from household to household in a spiral of antisocial behaviour. Access to his music allows *Montage of Heck* details such as an isolated vocal track of Cobain singing "Territorial Pissings", revealing a throat-shredding attempt to yowl his way out of the constraints of language. The film's title comes from a home-recorded cassette collaging together squealing electronics, TV samples and heavily treated vocal wanderings.

Above all *Montage of Heck* makes use of access to Cobain's extensive journals: pages of doodles, daydreams, draft lyrics, resolutions and life-in-a-band shopping lists. *Montage of Heck* is arguably as much a film adaptation or animated edition of the journals as it is a biopic of Cobain. At times Morgen simply highlights: words or lines appear in isolation on the screen before the rest of the page fades in – a version of the iris-in and iris-out techniques used in the silent era when directors wanted an audience to 'read' a particular detail in a frame. But there's a clear decision not to treat the pages of Cobain's journals as holy writ, to be preserved untouched under glass. Instead, Morgen and a team of animators get their hands sticky, cutting and pasting journal sections into short animated sequences. (Some of these touches may not age well.) But the cumulative effect of the journal material is profound, even in small details, such as the way Cobain's anxiety about his own physical frailty manifests itself in



Made in Seattle: Kurt Cobain

compulsive cartoons of scrawny homunculi.

As with his Rolling Stones documentary *Crossfire Hurricane* (2012), Morgen prizes rhythm, momentum and feel above all in his storytelling and editing. *Montage of Heck* is no dutiful chronology of the band's ins and outs – even Grohl's recruitment on drums goes unflagged in the attempt to get into Cobain's head. Not that Cobain is sanitised or sanctified: the home footage of him with a pregnant Love, holed up after *Nevermind* for a months-long heroin binge, is uncomfortable viewing – ditto when he appears to be nodding out with his infant daughter on his knee (Frances Bean Cobain, credited here as an executive producer).

Cobain's death begins to exert a kind of malign magnetism towards the end, sucking

the viewer's thoughts forwards to the question of how Morgen will handle it, and past events such as the recording of the group's last studio album, the scouring *In Utero*, and the becalmed blues of their *MTV Unplugged* session. The answer is an intertitle, stating the bare facts of Cobain's death in Seattle in April 1994, before the credits roll. Conspiracy theories about Cobain's death still circulate, a can of worms that Nick Broomfield in his 1998 doc *Kurt & Courtney* couldn't open fast enough. Morgen's approach sidesteps this and thereby avoids any morbid notes or suicide glorification. Yet it feels abrupt compared with Morgen's approach throughout the film – exhaustive, expansive and energetic.

There are a couple of wider contexts Morgen could have done more to sketch in. One is the sheer blandness of the American pop charts at the end of the 1980s, dominated by MTV's mall-ready music culture, from the catalogue-rock complacency of Robert Palmer or Genesis to the profoundly phony rebel yells of hairspray metal acts such as Mötley Crüe or Skid Row. Terminal boredom all but summoned forth a band of Nirvana's scabrous intensity. Another is the underground culture that nourished Cobain – the mulch created as punk rotted down after its brief flowering in the US, in which all kinds of weird weeds, ugly but tough, such as Black Flag, Killdozer, Sonic Youth, Flipper, Big Black, Meat Puppets and more, were able to thrive, away from bright lights or big stages. One film about Cobain to do this was A.J. Schnack's *About a Son* (2006), which juxtaposed audio of Cobain interviews with shots of his native north-west; without permission to use Nirvana's music, it was soundtracked instead with his grunge and pre-grunge contemporaries. It's a far more austere document, lacking the verve and energy of Morgen's *Montage of Heck*, but taken as a pair the two films are likely the closest you could get to Cobain's story told in his own words. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Brett Morgen
Danielle Renfrew
Behrens
Written by
Brett Morgen
Photography
James Whitaker
Editing
Joe Beshenkovsky
Brett Morgen
Music
Jeff Danna
Sound Design
Cameron Frankley

Production Companies
HBO Documentary
Films and
Universal Pictures
International
Entertainment
Content Group
in association
with Public Road
Productions and The
End of Music present
A film by Brett
Morgen

Executive Producers
Frances Bean Cobain
Larry Mestel
David Byrnes

In Colour

Distributor
Munro Film Services

A documentary exploring the life of Kurt Cobain, singer and guitarist with Nirvana, using previously unseen photographs and home movies from the Cobain family archive and material from Cobain's private journals. Interviews with his parents, widow Courtney Love and bandmates Krist Novoselic and Dave Grohl tell the story of Nirvana's dramatic ascent to global stardom with the 1991 album 'Nevermind'. The film ends with an intertitle reporting Cobain's suicide in 1994.

Dark Horse

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Louise Osmond
Certificate PG 86m 2s



Groomed for success: Brian Vokes

Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

The last time British filmmaker Louise Osmond had a documentary in UK cinemas (most of her features to date have been for the small screen) was with *Deep Water* in 2006. It was the bizarre story of Donald Crowhurst, the amateur yachtsman and inventor who disappeared while engaged in an extraordinary attempt to fake his circumnavigation of the world for the 1968 Golden Globe race. For anyone who had either forgotten or never lived through the attendant media hubbub, Osmond's film (co-directed with Jerry Rothwell) provided a thrilling account of an episode from sporting history that seemed too far-fetched to be true. *Dark Horse* also has its roots in a belief-begging chapter of British sport – indeed,

it's been subtitled for release 'The Incredible True Story of Dream Alliance', presumably to differentiate it from the current New Zealand feature *The Dark Horse*. It's a fable of the credit-crunch era, but one that will be unfamiliar to anybody who doesn't follow the racing news.

Dream Alliance was a thoroughbred racehorse raised by Welsh barmaid Jan Vokes with money pooled from £10-a-week contributions from members of her local community. Despite the horse's gangly appearance and unpromising beginnings, under the best trainer the group could afford it began to show impressive form, providing the syndicate of villagers with a ticket into the elite world of racing and leading eventually to their horse winning the Welsh National in 2009 and, finally, competing in the 2010 Grand National.

Beginning with images of mist rolling over the Welsh valleys, this is a handsomely shot documentary which offers a non-fiction spin on that hoary old genre, the sporting underdog movie, at the same time throwing its hat into the ring with UK films such as *Brassed Off* (1996) and *The Full Monty* (1997) that espouse extracurricular collective activity as a fillip for disenfranchised communities. As much as it is an inspiring account of a scrappy horse from the valleys far exceeding its competitive potential, *Dark Horse* is also a tribute to the Caerphilly collective whose dilettante flirtation with the world of horseracing unexpectedly drifted into fairytale territory.

As a portrait of human striving, Osmond's new film is less nuanced than *Deep Water*, and arguably pushes those little-people-done-good buttons a touch too firmly. The pluck and irrepressible enthusiasm of Vokes and her collaborators are justly celebrated, but *Dark Horse*'s story at times feels streamlined for its cockle-warming potential. We're chaperoned through the peaks and troughs of the horse's progress – its stunning early successes, its dramatic injury, the stem-cell treatment that enables it to race again – by orchestral music that feels too massaging by half. Conversely, Osmond never probes questions of racehorse welfare, which for some viewers will puncture the narrative's feelgood thrust.

Still, this is a compelling story that's impossible not to get caught up in. There's the meat of a cheering dramatic feature along the lines of *Pride* (2014) in here, but *Dark Horse* proves once more that documentary storytelling can more than hold its own as crowd-pleasing and immersive entertainment. **B**

Dark Summer

USA/United Kingdom 2013
Director: Paul Solet
Certificate PG 81m 24s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

The 'dark' in *Dark Summer*'s seemingly generic title can be understood as several things: the protagonist's imposed communication silence while under house arrest; the occult horrors that he's physically and legally unable to escape; or the long shadow of teen-movie elements half-heartedly incorporated into the plot.

Daniel (Keir Gilchrist) has been caught cyberstalking his goth classmate Mona, and is being punished while his mother is away on a business trip. While Stokes, a standard-issue gruff parole officer (Peter Stormare), explains how an elaborate technological set-up will prevent any internet access during lockdown, two of Daniel's friends – Abby (Stella Maeve) and Kevin (Maestro Harrell), the sad-eyed sylph he's friendzoned and the sassy black bro respectively – stop by later that night with a WiFi-enabled iPad and some weed. (That no neighbours report their multiple visits or extended taking sessions in Daniel's backyard throughout the film reveals the writer's fundamental misunderstanding of suburban America; for neighbourhood-watch advocates, their flagrancy must be *such* a tease.) Their relief at this solution (however unbelievable) is almost immediately shattered when, while Skyping with Abby, Daniel gets a video call from Mona, who tells him "You will feel what I feel" and blows her brains out as he watches helplessly.

The trauma of Mona's violent death is intensified not only because Daniel believes himself responsible but also because he had romantic feelings for her, so at first his guilt manifests itself as glimpses of her inside his house and strange dreams (or so it seems). His murky attraction is something his friends frequently comment on because they don't understand it: the two of them barely spoke, and Mona was notoriously aloof and, according to Kevin, only cared about "listening to that emotional-ass music and acting like a misunderstood bitch".

As the supernatural events escalate – never all that scary, gross or interesting, and overly reliant on the 'shock' effect of sudden loud noises – it's revealed that Mona was actually a witch who cast a spell to make Daniel become obsessed with her. (The 'big reveal' takes place when Kevin and Abby sneak into Mona's house and discover a secret room full of props that look like *True Detective* overstock.) Yet why either gloomy Mona or peppy Abby would be attracted to Daniel's dull everyman never really adds up (even socially awkward teenage witches can do better). Daniel's house, which seems to have an inordinate amount of 'creepy' ceramic tchotchkes with the paint half rubbed off, doesn't contain any possessions that reflect his personality or interests – save for the ceiling of his room, which has binary code painted on it. (Perhaps that's a tell: he's just a zero.) But then, all the characters in this gothic-infused chamber drama are so thinly written that horror's usual emotional stakes – either willing them to escape or cheering on their demise – fail to be conjured.

Without that crucial interplay between identification and its opposite, *Dark Summer* becomes a tedious slog through a fairground

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Judith Dawson
Director of Photography
Benjamin Kracun
Editor
Joby Gee
Composer
Anne Nikitin
Sound
Olly Astles-Jones
John Hagenstede

©Darlow Smithson
Productions Limited,
The British Film
Institute, Channel
Four Television
Corporation, Film

Cymru Wales
Production Companies
Film4, Channel 4
& BFI present in
association with
Film Cymru Wales
a DSP & World's End
Pictures production
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Julian Ware
Lizzie Francke
Anna Higgs
Anna Miralis
Adam Partridge

Emily Dalton

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

UK publicity title
**Dark Horse: The
Incredible True
Story of Dream
Alliance**

A documentary about Dream Alliance, a racehorse owned by a syndicate from rural Wales.

A barmaid in a working men's club, Jan Vokes has a sideline as a breeder of whippets and pigeons. She and her husband Brian buy a £300 thoroughbred mare and pair it with an ageing stallion, then persuade members of their community to pay £10 a month each to raise the resulting foal on a disused allotment. They name the horse Dream Alliance. With the help of the best trainer the group of villagers can afford, Dream Alliance begins to do surprisingly well in its early races, eventually winning a succession of competitions and gaining significant media attention. A serious tendon injury temporarily stops Dream Alliance competing, but after pioneering stem-cell treatment he goes on to win the Welsh National in 2009. A hopeful for the 2010 Grand National, Dream Alliance fails to complete the race, and disappointing positions in subsequent competitions convince the syndicate that their horse's racing days are over.

Dream Alliance now lives in retirement. Vokes says she intends to buy another racehorse.

The Decent One

Israel/USA/Austria/Germany/France 2014

Director: Vanessa Lapa

Certificate 15 96m 6s

Reviewed by Paul Tickell

The Nazis, WWII, the death camps – as documentary subjects, haven't they been exhausted by now? That's the frequent weary question, anyway. But the answer is that there is always another story to tell about the horrors of 1939-45, an inexhaustible supply of human drama, albeit with unspeakable inhumanity in the leading role.

Surely nobody was more inhumane and cruel than Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi most responsible for the genocidal machine that was the concentration camps. But as Vanessa Lapa's documentary reveals, for Himmler it was killing at a distance: while he took centre stage as Reichsführer of the SS, the deaths that he commanded were meted out by others in the vast dark wings. Real blood was on subordinate hands, while his remained clean – well manicured even – as he wrote the diary entries, letters and notes that form the basis of this film.

Actors voice Himmler's written words and those of his correspondents – mainly his wife Margarete, daughter Gudrun and mistress Hedwig. Thus the film is provided with a running commentary constructed from snippets of information and the various thoughts Himmler had about anything from the erotic anticipation of seeing his wife to sorting out communist, homosexual and above all Jewish 'vermin'.

The words sit in thought-provoking, often ironic counterpoint to the images on screen – lots of newsreel and previously unseen photographs of Himmler at work and play. There are other images from the time – of Jews being beaten in the street, Poland invaded, prisoners shoved into a pit and shot, their murder overseen by an officer in peacock pose. In voiceover we hear Himmler's brutal aside about the development of "interesting shooting procedures". The film is all the more unsettling because next up could be, literally, a bed of roses, a heap of broken bodies or Hitler staring into the camera and so at us. Sometimes the sharp, disconcerting edges are blunted. The sound effects in particular distract, trying too hard to enhance the largely mute footage – a dog's bark added and then magnified in the mix, for instance.

By the end of the film we have a very clear image of Himmler from baby boy to the man



Lines of duty: Heinrich Himmler

who, guarded by a tommy, looks as if he's asleep on a living-room floor – he has in fact committed suicide by taking cyanide, after being captured by the Allies in 1945. But striking images do not a biography make. Although we glimpse the bigger historical picture between the lines of the letters, this remains a very partial portrait of Himmler. There is no explanation of how this awkward, unprepossessing individual so rapidly became politically all-powerful. We learn about his bowel complaints but nothing of the 'philosopher king' who introduced ideas from paganism and ritual magic into the Nazi worldview – and into the design of SS insignia. A further big omission is his desperate attempt, behind Hitler's back, to make peace with the Allies in 1945.

Nevertheless this remains a mesmerising and worthwhile film. In its closing scenes, as colour footage is added for the first time to the black-and-white archive material, it chimes with Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil', a phrase prompted by the trial of that other high-flying administrator of the 'final solution', Adolf Eichmann. With the taste of human extermination in our mouths, we are treated to Himmler reducing his crimes against humanity into a banal, self-serving morality tale. He was indeed one of the very 'decent' ones, those fine SS fellows who had a dirty job to do but did it well and at great personal risk, and who even suffered a little on the inside in the process.



Witchfinder: Keir Gilchrist

haunted house rather than an engaging, creepy thrill. (The fact that the tense, claustrophobic atmosphere it achieves in the first act is completely undermined by unimaginative scary effects also draws unfavourable comparisons with Coney Island.) The film's final twist – Kevin, Abby and Daniel's collective efforts to investigate and stop Mona have in fact only completed the spell, and now Mona possesses Abby's body – feels more like the end to a teenage-authored creepypasta than a film that's worth 90 minutes of your time. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ross M. Dinerstein	Companies Content Media Corporation presents a Preferred Film & TV production	Mona Wilson
Written by Mike Le	Produced by Kermadec Productions PLC	Peter Stormare Stokes
Director of Photography Zoran Popovic	Executive Producers Jamie Carmichael Kevin Iwashina	Dinora Walcott voice of Principal Nakata
Edited by Josh Ethier	Cast Keir Gilchrist	In Colour [1.78:1]
Production Designer Ariana Nakata	Daniel	Distributor Content
Music Austin Wintory	Stella Maeve	
Sound Design Herwig Maurer	Abby	
Costume Designer Chantal Filson	Maestro Harrell	
	Kevin	
	Grace Phipps	

US, the present. Daniel is under house arrest after hacking into classmate Mona's computer; he must wear an ankle bracelet and there are also devices in the house to prevent him from accessing the internet. Daniel's friends Abby and Kevin visit him, bringing some marijuana and a WiFi-enabled iPad. As he's speaking with Abby later via Skype, he gets a video call from Mona and sees her shoot herself in the head. He discovers a package in his backyard full of candles, and lights them. Daniel starts seeing a hoodie-wearing figure who is clearly Mona, and soon strange phenomena involving bugs and technology occur. Abby and Kevin search Mona's bedroom and discover that she was a witch with a shrine to Daniel. The three friends attempt an exorcism but it fails. Kevin is killed. Mona, possessing Abby's body, cuts off Daniel's leg and with it the house-arrest ankle bracelet, and takes him away.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Vanessa Lapa	Noam Amit	for Israeli Films -	In co-production with Felix Breisach Medienwerkstatt GmbH, ORF, mdr1, WDR 1	a grant from the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Ronald Guttman, Hava Breindel	Dolby Digital In Black & White and Colour [1.85:1]
Script Vanessa Lapa	Original Score Jonathan Sheffer	Sponsored by the Israeli Film Council	Medienwerkstatt GmbH, ORF, mdr1, WDR 1	In co-production with Felix Breisach Medienwerkstatt GmbH, ORF, mdr1, WDR 1	Part-subtitled
Archive Image Hermann	Sound Designer Tomer Eliav	With the support of Claims Conference - the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Highbrow	A production of Realworks	Developed with the support of La Fémis ARCHIDOC	Distributor Curzon Film World
Document Animation DOP Jeremy Portnoi	Production Companies yes.docuHD DBS	In association with Barbara and Martin Schlaff, Guido Hettlinger	Supported by Barbara and Martin Schlaff, Jacques Graubart,	Produced for yes.	
Editors Sharon Brook	Satellite Television Makor Foundation				

A documentary about the SS leader Heinrich Himmler, using his letters and diaries to document his life.

Himmler is born in 1900 to a well-to-do Bavarian family and grows up in a culture of royalism and right-wing Catholicism. By the outbreak of WWI he is a fervent nationalist and virulent anti-Semite; in the 1920s his

fascist leanings intensify, he abandons his religion and becomes a member of the Nazi party and the SS. As Hitler's right-hand man during WWII he is the driving force behind the death camps and the 'final solution'. Captured by the Allies in 1945 he commits suicide, leaving a wife, two children (one adopted) and a mistress.

The Divergent Series Insurgent

USA 2015

Director: Robert Schwentke

Certificate 12A 118m 48s

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

In an anything-goes climate where *House of Cards* can be praised for its positive, counter-stereotypical portrayal of grown-up videogamers – and indeed can be mistaken for serious political drama – it seems unfair to relegate the *Divergent* franchise, of which this is the second part, to 'Young Adult' status. The excellent 2011 film of that title contrasted the teenage fantasies purveyed by Charlize Theron's thirtysomething novelist protagonist with her much messier reality, but it can't really be said that this series, based on a trilogy by the twentysomething Veronica Roth, is notably more adolescent in sensibility than the majority of its commercial peers.

The films are set in a post-apocalyptic Chicago that has been divided into five factions based on character traits – Candor, Amity and so on – plus the Factionless outcasts. In the first instalment, heroine Tris Prior (Shailene Woodley) discovered that she is Divergent, conforming to no one faction, and almost foiled an attempt by the intellectuals (Erudite) to manipulate the fighters (Dauntless) into seizing power from the ruling faction (Abnegation) in which she was raised. This second instalment begins with Tris and her Divergent boyfriend Four (Theo James) on the run from Erudite leader Jeanine (Kate Winslet), who has discovered a magical box that only Tris can open. Tris and Four's search for sanctuary leads them into the clutches of Four's thought-to-be-dead mother Evelyn (Naomi Watts, looking no older than the 30-year-old James), now leading an army of rebellious Factionless.

There is a lot of plot and backstory, complicated by numerous dream or dreamlike scenarios, but it is handled with exemplary clarity, and the action sequences are well above average.



Theo James, Miles Teller, Shailene Woodley

The many secondary characters can be read instantly from their factions, faces and costumes. Tris alone provides complexity: guilt-ridden, still coming to terms with her power, unsure what path to take. Much of the film consists of discussions of revolutionary tactics. Having rejected Amity's pacifism and Candor's constitutionalism, Tris reluctantly has to side with the dangerous but committed Evelyn, who is also something of a rival for Four's affections ("Do you want to tuck him in or should I?" asks his mother after an argument).

This is, or would be, the middle instalment – modishly, the producers are doing Roth's third book as two films – but ends satisfyingly. A mawkish 'victory parade' on the discovery that Tris is, essentially, Jesus Christ, is cut brutally short by a sample of what life under Evelyn might entail. The fact that victory over Jeanine feels like the last day of school is just one way in which *Insurgent* shows its roots. The sneers these films attract may derive from a sense that teenagers ought to like things that haven't been designed for teenagers – the corollary apparently being that adults are encouraged to like things that have. They are unwarranted and hypocritical. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Douglas Wick
Lucy Fisher
Pouya Shahbazian
Screenplay
Brian Duffield
Akiva Goldsman
Mark Bomback
Based on the novel *Insurgent* by Veronica Roth
Director of Photography
Florian Ballhaus
Editors
Nancy Richardson
Stuart Levy
Production Designer
Alec Hammond
Music
Joseph Trapanese

Supervising Sound Editors
Dave McMoyler
Wylie Stateman
Costume Designer
Louise Mingenbach
Visual Effects Supervisor
James Madigan
Visual Effects by
Double Negative
Double Negative
Singapore
Luma Pictures
Animal Logic VFX
Method Studios
Iola VFX
Crafty Apes
capital T
Stunt Co-ordinator
Darrin Prescott

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Production Companies
Summit
Entertainment presents a Red Wagon Entertainment production
A Mandeville Films production
A Robert Schwentke film
Completed with assistance from the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office
Executive Producers
Todd Lieberman

David Hoberman
Barry Waldman
Neil Burger
Cast
Shailene Woodley
Beatrice Prior, 'Tris'
Theo James
Tobias Eaton, 'Four'
Octavia Spencer
Johanna Reyes
Jai Courtney
Eric Coulter
Ray Stevenson
Marcus Eaton
Zoë Kravitz
Christina
Miles Teller
Peter Hayes
Ansel Elgort

Caleb Prior
Maggie Q
Tori Wu
Mekhi Phifer
Max
Janet McTeer
Edith Prior
Daniel Dae Kim
Jack Kang
Naomi Watts
Evelyn Johnson-Eaton
Kate Winslet
Jeanine Matthews
Emjay Anthony
Hector
Keiynan Lonsdale
Uriah Pedrad
Rosa Salazar
Lynn
Suki Waterhouse
Marlene

Jonny Weston
Edgar
Dolby Atmos/ Datasat Colour by
Technicolor
Prints by
FotoKem
[2.35:1]
Some screenings presented in 3D
Distributor
EI Films

In post-apocalyptic Chicago, survivors are divided into factions according to character traits: Candor, Amity, Dauntless, Abnegation, Erudite. Tris and Four – both 'Divergents', belonging to no faction – are on the run from de facto dictator Jeanine. The Divergents return to Chicago, lodging first with a gang of rebels led by Four's mother Evelyn, then going to Candor to pick up the remaining rebels from Dauntless. Tris is briefly captured by Jeanine's soldiers in a raid but is freed by her allies. During the raid, however, Dauntless members manage to attach mind-control devices to ex-Dauntless rebels, which Jeanine uses to make Tris surrender by having rebels kill themselves on a daily basis.

Jeanine has a magic box, originally owned by Tris's parents, which only a full Divergent can open, and which she thinks will solve the Divergent problem. To open it, Tris is forced to undergo five trials in a simulator so vivid that it almost kills her. In the final trial, she learns to forgive herself for the death of her mother. Contrary to Jeanine's expectations, when the box opens it contains a message from the founders of Chicago's five-faction society, explaining that it has all been an experiment designed to produce the perfect Divergent – Tris – and that there is human life beyond the wall protecting the city from the outside world. While the people celebrate, Evelyn shoots Jeanine in the back of the head.

The Duff

USA 2015

Director: Ari Sandel

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The power struggle between popular kids and misfits is, apparently, eternal, but luckily the misfits always win – sort of. This latest run-through of the comfortingly familiar high-school-comedy narrative begins with a standard delineation of the character types associated with the genre, as frumpy brain-box Bianca (Mae Whitman), a witty observer of her milieu, introduces the jocks, the geeks, the loners and the mean girls. Her air of confident aloofness is shattered, though, when her next-door neighbour and childhood friend Wesley (Robbie Amell) reveals that her true status is not in fact witty observer but DUFF – 'designated ugly fat friend' – to the better-looking Casey and Jess. Bianca's devastation is comically compared to the five stages of grief, though don't hold your breath for the moment when she begins to question the validity of the social snakes-and-ladders board down which she has just ignominiously slithered; no, the solution must be to ditch her pretty friends, become more pleasing to the all-pervasive male gaze and get a date with her crush Toby. Obviously.

For some reason, Wesley's brutal honesty makes Bianca trust him as her makeover coach. Soon he is steering her into the lingerie department at the local mall for a better bra, and encouraging her to practise flirting with random strangers. In the real world, all of this would be deeply creepy, but we are in the universe of the high-school comedy, where conforming to stereotypes is the only possible route to self-respect, and where crushing insecurity can be overcome with slapstick. Josh A. Cagan's screenplay – from the novel by Kody Keplinger – achieves this comedic catharsis with admirable slickness, piling on the excruciating embarrassment but wiping out any existential angst with an avalanche of well-crafted wisecracks and an endearing propensity to take everything just a little bit too far.

It's as a vehicle for Whitman that the film succeeds most convincingly: her charm and comic timing make her highly watchable, and she plays well off Amell, who mines the dumb-jock seam with self-mocking aplomb. Cagan and director Ari Sandel attempt to update the film's profoundly reactionary sexual politics by staging Bianca's public humiliation and transformation within the ultra-surveillance of Instagram and YouTube culture, but this is really just a zeitgeisty add-on to the essential plot in which the beautiful, popular girl (Bella Thorne) is revealed to be a cold-hearted bitch who must be knocked down a few pegs by the try-hard underdog. Thorne, groomed and styled like a well-preserved 35-year-old, makes the least convincing teenager seen on screen in a long time, although the two leads, both in their mid-twenties, also stretch credibility as goofy kids. The adult roles, meanwhile, are predictably reduced to a kind of rudimentary puerility, though Ken Jeong puts in a welcome retread of his weird-teacher shtick from the sitcom *Community*, and Allison Janney squeezes a lot of fun from her sketched-in role as Bianca's brittle and self-obsessed mother.

For all its genre sameness and deeply offensive premise, it's impossible to take *The*



Fitting pretty: Mae Whitman

Duff too seriously. Yes, it peddles the tricky proposition that it's fine to be a misfit as long as you can prove you're not really a misfit after all. And yes, it assumes that men are the best judges of what women ought to be and do. But luckily nobody in their right mind believes that life really works like this. Do they? ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

McG
Mary Viola
Susan Cartsonis
Screenplay
Josh A. Cagan
Based on the book
by Kody Keplinger
Director of
Photography
David Hennings
Edited by
Wendy Greene
Bricmont
Production
Designer
Aaron Osborne
Music
Dominic Lewis
Sound Mixer
Felipe Borrero
Costume Designer
Eric Daman

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Pictures Inc
Production
Companies
CBS Films presents

a Wonderful Sound

and Vision/Vast
Entertainment
production
Completed with
assistance from
the Georgia Film,
Music & Digital
Entertainment
Office, a division
of the Georgia
Department
of Economic
Development
This production
participated in
the New York
State Governor's
Office for Motion
Picture & Television
Development's
Post Production
Credit Program
Executive
Producers
Lane Shefter Bishop
Steven Bello
Ted Gidlow

Cast

Mae Whitman
Bianca Piper
Robbie Amell
Wesley Rush
Bella Thorne
Madison Carter
Bianca Santos
Casey
Skyler Samuels
Jess
Romany Malco
Principal Buchanan
Ken Jeong
Mr Arthur
Allison Janney
Dottie Piper
Nick Eversman
Tony

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
E! Films

Suburban US, present day. Clever, good-natured teenager Bianca is reasonably secure of her place within the high-school pecking order, until friend Wesley brutally informs her that she is the 'DUFF' (Designated Ugly Fat Friend) to her two better-looking companions Casey and Jess. Horrified, Bianca breaks off her friendship with the girls and offers Wesley a deal: in return for his help in transforming her appearance, she will coach him in the science subjects he needs to pass. The pair are soon having fun together, which alerts Wesley's sometime girlfriend, the bitchy Madison, to a potential rival. Madison circulates a video of Bianca looking idiotic and declaring her crush on the soulful, guitar-playing Toby. Bianca is mocked by the whole school – but gets a date with Toby. However, when he turns out to be shallow and boring, Bianca realises she'd rather be with Wesley. She makes peace with her girlfriends, who help her to make a triumphant entrance to the school homecoming. She and Wesley get together, much to Madison's annoyance.

Everly

USA 2014
Director: Joe Lynch
Certificate 18 91m 58s

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Not, as you may've idly hoped, a biopic of the Everly Brothers, this low-budget exercise in bloodletting gimmickry seems quintessentially of its moment – a Hollywood 'indie' with not a stitch of humanity in its fabric, just snarky post-post-Tarantino quips, tits-and-guns tongue-wagging and triumphalist bullet-blasts.

Director Joe Lynch and co-writer Yale Hannon aim low: Salma Hayek, as a sex slave to some kind of America-based yakuza lord, has had enough after an offscreen gang-rape, and starts killing armies of henchmen, reward-grubbing hookers and flak-jacketed troopers. The primary contrivance is that she never leaves her spacious apartment: Hayek's bloodied Amazon, who has somehow acquired the skills of a ninja-trained Navy Seal, tries to exit 25 times or more, but something always stops her. Claustrophobia and scoffing boredom are the collateral result, despite cartoon violence that predictably dispatches minor characters instantly but allows more major protagonists to rise three or four times before finally expiring. You can't count how many disposable baddies are stopped mid-death-blow by a sudden bullet from somewhere. There are myriad other ruses, all hackneyed and childish, and Hayek comes off aptly enough as a B-movie amateur, cast only for her figure. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Adam Ripp
Rob Paris
Luke Rivett
Andrew Pfeffer
Screenplay
Yale Hannon
Story
Joe Lynch
Yale Hannon
Director of
Photography
Steve Gainer
Edited by
Evan Schiff
Production
Designer
Ondrej Nekvasil
Music
Bear McCreary
Production Mixer
Nenad Vukadinovic
Costume Designers
Olivia Miles
Momirka Bailovic

©Everly Productions
Limited
Production
Companies
RADIUS-TWC,
Dimension Films and
Vega Baby! present
in association with

Sierra/Affinity
a Crime Scene
Pictures production
in association with
Anonymous Content
A Joe Lynch film
Executive
Producers
Rizal Risjad
Ricky Budhrani
Paul Green

Cast

Salma Hayek
Everly
Hiroyuki Watanabe
Taiko
Laura Cepeda
Edith
Togo Igawa
the sadist
Akie Kotabe
dead man
Gabriella Wright
Anna
Caroline Chikezie
Zelda
Jennifer Blanc
Dena
Jelena Gavrilovic
Elyse

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor
E! Films

US, present day. Everly, a woman enslaved by Japanese mobsters, staggers into her bathroom after what appears to have been a gang-rape. She pulls a gun from the toilet tank and embarks on a spree of vengeance killing. Dispatching various henchmen who arrive, Everly attempts to get her mother and little daughter into the building so that she can give them a stash of money to start a new life. The mob sends man-eating dogs, a deranged torturer called the Sadist and abseiling assassins to Everly's apartment but she dispatches all of them. Eventually the gang's leader arrives, and a final showdown ensues.

Exit

Director: Chienn Hsiang

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

She's not quite a mother, since her teenage daughter can barely be bothered with her. She's not exactly a wife either, since her husband, away working in Shanghai, never answers her calls. So where does fortysomething Ling stand? The sweatshop where she works won't be there for ever, and her youth is ebbing away as the menopause beckons. However, seeing her bedridden elderly mother-in-law in hospital reminds her that she's not exactly decrepit yet, especially when the injured man in the bed opposite sets her tingling with feelings she wasn't sure she still had.

Veteran of no fewer than seven Tsai Ming-liang films, Chen Shiang-chyi won Taiwan's Golden Horse Award for her performance as Ling – deserved recognition for the sort of supremely controlled quietness that doesn't always pick up acting gongs but here proves the cumulatively transfixing key to a touching saga of sexual and emotional liberation.

Possibly through her time with Tsai and his extended unfolding single-take scenes, Chen has grasped exactly how to put the 'acting' away and make everyday being a compelling spectacle in its own right. As Ling hangs out the washing on the roof of her apartment, works at her sewing machine or tends to her mother-in-law on the ward, the simplicity of allowing the audience to spend time with her allows writer-director Chienn Hsiang to observe with empathy and precision. So when Ling does eventually move beyond the parameters circumscribing her seemingly arid everyday lot, that sense of modest yet definable transformation really hits home. Giving a sip of water to the isolated hospital patient Mr Chang – his eyes bandaged after an accident – is one such tiny gesture, but it soon leads to the illicit frisson of secretly massaging his body in the dead of night when no one's around, and it's not long before a rejuvenated Ling is putting on lipstick, pulling on a gorgeous floral dress and slipping out into the streets. ➡



Bandage aid: Chen Shiang-Chyi

Building up the story through repetition and variation within a limited number of locations (though the context is different, there are surprising echoes of Wong Kar-Wai), Chienn's film impresses with the care taken over its *mise en scène*, whose compositions see Ling framed within boxed-in interiors, or almost lost in the bustle of the city in moments that tellingly underline the virtual invisibility of middle-aged women in these social surroundings.

For all the film's achievement in allowing us to experience Ling's frustrations and her gradually renascent self-confidence, it's all on a relatively small scale in terms of narrative reach and complexity. Yes, there's some tension in whether Ling will be able to effect her mid-life breakout, but perhaps not quite enough to intensify the film's dramatic impact. As the second feature for former cinematographer Chienn, however, it is a marker of growing accomplishment and a notable statement of intent. If he pushes himself that bit harder next time, the possibilities are tantalising indeed. **Ⓢ**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Chen Pao-Ying
Screenplay
Chienn Hsiang
Director of Photography
Chienn Hsiang
Editors
Terng Jaw-Chyang
Liang Chueh-Han
Art Director
Chen Hsuan-Shao
Music
Lei Summer
Production
Sound Mixer
Huang Bonas
Costume Designer
Wang Kuan-I

Production Companies
Gray Wolf International
Production Co. Ltd, Chienn Hsiang Studio, Ko-Hiong
Lang present
With the

participation of Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development, Ministry of Culture

Cast
Chen Shiang-Chyi
Ling
Dong Easton
Mr Chang
Pai Ming-Hua
mother-in-law
Shun Yu An
brother-in-law
Wen Chen-Ling
Mei Mei
Huang Tsi Yi
May Hong
Tasi Ming Hsiu

In Colour
Subtitles

Distributor
Facet Film Distribution

Taiwanese theatrical title
Hui guang zoumingqu

Taiwan, present day. Ling, a wife and mother in her mid-forties, lives in a small ill-kempt apartment with her teenage daughter Mei Mei, with whom she has a fractious relationship. Ling's husband is away working in Shanghai, and doesn't return her phone calls. She works in a garment sweatshop but also tends to her mother-in-law, who's bedridden in hospital. Ling becomes intrigued by middle-aged Mr Chang, who is in the bed opposite her mother-in-law's, and whose eyes are bandaged following an accident. Ling learns that her workplace will soon close. A visit to the doctor confirms that she's facing the menopause. Ling finds herself drawn to the lonely Mr Chang, sensuously wiping his sweat away during the night as part of what will become a silent, increasingly sexualised illicit liaison. Helping a former workmate with dress alterations for her tango class gives Ling a new lease of life, and she even puts on a floral dress and heads out on the town – only to retreat after spotting the now estranged Mei Mei in a restaurant with her boyfriend. At the hospital, Mr Chang is nearing recovery and his bandages are removed, but Ling announces her presence by putting a mask over his eyes, and touching him again in a moment of mutual recognition.

The Falling

United Kingdom 2014
Director: Carol Morley
Certificate 15 102m 3s



Lives of the faints: Maisie Williams

See Feature on page 28

Reviewed by Charlie Fox

Now that we know *all* about boyhood, it seems right to cheer for its more enigmatic female counterpart. Girls have long ruled at the cinema when it comes to tales staged in that wilderness between childhood innocence and adolescent knowledge, but such films always favour far dreamier treatment of this fragile time. A spellbinding tradition of films exists in which the wild discoveries of girlhood – often but never exclusively erotic in nature – come hand in hand with other unsettling or perverse disturbances of everyday life. Among the exemplary works in this little-mentioned genre are Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Lucile Hadžihalilovic's *Innocence* (2004) and Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), with their taste for unheimlich

reverie and their transformations of landscapes into pregnantly suggestive symbols.

Carol Morley's *The Falling* perhaps attempts to be the British inheritor of these films by dabbling in a similar mixture of the domestic and the magical, but it never equals the power of those luminous touchstones. The narrative, which centres on a strange outbreak of mass fainting at an English girls' school, has a hint of gothic melodrama about it – black parasols are all the rage here – with the additional temporal disorientation of an end-of-the-60s setting, though the decade only casts its spangled shadow in the discreet forms of hideous wallpaper and Motown on the jukebox. Even as a surface lure, the scenario of inexplicable fainting fits bristles with metaphorical possibilities. The welter of swooning spells collected in this film signify – at various points – anti-authority

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Cairo Cannon
Luc Roeg
Written by
Carol Morley
Director of Photography
Agnès Godard
Film Editor
Chris Wyatt
Production Designer
Janey Levick
Music and Songs
Tracey Thorn

Sound Recordist
Grant Bridgeman
Costume Designer
Sian Jenkins

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Production Companies
BBC Films and BFI present in

association with LipSync Productions a Cannon and Morley/Independent production in association with Boudica Red
A film by Carol Morley
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Lizzie Francke
Christine Langan

Andrew Orr
Norman Merry
Peter Hampden
Rebecca Long
Ian Davies

Cast
Maisie Williams
Lydia Lamont
Maxine Peake
Eileen Lamont
Monica Dolan
Miss Martha Alvaro

Greta Scacchi
Miss Edith Mantel
Mathew Baynton
Mr Hopkins
Florence Pugh
Abbie Mortimer
Joe Cole
Kenneth Lamont
Morfydd Clark
Miss Pamela Charron
Anna Burnett
Susan
Rose Caton
Titch

Evie Hooton
Janet
Katie Ann Knight
Connie
Lauren McCrostie
Gwen

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Metrodome Distribution Ltd

A girls' school in rural England, 1969. Teenagers Lydia and Abbie are best friends. Abbie is sexually promiscuous and fears she may be pregnant; the chaste Lydia believes this threatens their friendship. At home, Lydia's brother Kenneth schools them both in occult beliefs, suggesting supernatural presences in the landscape. Back at school, Abbie feels ill and, during an argument with Lydia, has a seizure and dies.

With the school in mourning, Lydia faints in class. Fainting soon spreads among the girls and also afflicts one of the teachers. No cause can be found for the epidemic, and the school is threatened with closure.

After a mass fainting in the assembly hall, several girls are hospitalised. Lydia admits to a doctor that she feigns her attacks. When she tells the other girls, they express bafflement, as their own collapses are genuine. Returning home, Lydia finds her brother in her bedroom; the erotic tension between them breaks and they have sex. Lydia's mother enters and banishes Kenneth from the house. Lydia confronts her about why their relationship has always been pained. She confesses that Lydia was conceived by an act of rape. Lydia climbs the lakeside tree that she and Abbie loved, and leaps into the water. Her mother saves her from drowning.

Focus

USA 2014

Directors: Glenn Ficarra, John Requa

Certificate 15 104m 39s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the spectrum of films about confidence trickery, *Focus* is lightweight entertainment like *The Sting* (1973) rather than an exploration of a horrifying moral vacuum like *The Grifters* (1990). New York, New Orleans and Buenos Aires are all so gorgeously filmed that their tourist boards would endorse the movie, even if it suggests that every hotel in these big cities is aswarm with smiling crooks out to grab your credit card or snatch your watch. Even the fact that the film's hustlers do their tricks in person while being charming to their victims is almost a nostalgic element in an era when the worst frauds are carried out online by data-harvesting bots and spammers.

In the con-game subgenre of the heist movie, it's mandatory to spring regular reversals and surprises on the audience and on the viewpoint characters. We're supposed to see through a few heavily signposted tells (as when Will Smith's conman Nicky is emphatically warned by a confederate not to gamble with a bagful of just-grifted communal cash) but be distracted from more cunningly hidden traps (a crucial fact about Nicky's relationship with his legendary crook father is sneakily withheld to set up one of the best surprises).

Focus breezes amorally but educationally through its dazzling how-to-be-a-pickpocket montage, then turns into a tauter suspense item for its standout scene in a private box at a big football game. B.D. Wong has a flamboyant turn as a flirtatious high-roller, escalating a trivial bet about how many patrons will ogle a scantily dressed woman as she walks past them into a million-dollar long shot – Sky Masterson of *Guys and Dolls* would have seen through it but it pays off here with a satisfying sting. The fact that the explanation is of *Mission: Impossible* (original series) levels of complexity lifts the film into fantasy, but it's none the poorer for that. Even the selection of an incidental song (the Rolling Stones' 'Sympathy for the Devil') is supposed to work subliminal magic on a Chinese-speaking mark



Cons and robbers: Will Smith, Margot Robbie

for whom 'woo woo' means something different.

Less successful is the film's second half, which picks up three years later in Buenos Aires and suffers from precisely the problem Nicky diagnoses in his relationship with fellow grifter Jess. There's no place for heart in his game, and the romcom aspects of the film are less persuasive than the cover stories the tricksters adopt. Smith – who first made an impression as a conman back in *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993) – is ideally cast as a plausible, self-regarding genius with a blind spot, and a calculatedly wide-eyed Margot Robbie gamely tries to keep up with him as Jess... but writer-directors Glenn Ficarra and John Requa are plainly a lot less interested in whether Nicky and Jess will get together at the end than in the schemes-within-schemes games both are playing along the way.

Though real-life reformed trickster Apollo Robbins was a consultant on the film, and the street-level wallet- and watch-filching is credible, *Focus* does err on the side of picturesque roguishness, with eccentric character turns from the likes of Adrian Martinez and Brennan Brown as Nicky's confederates, and bizarre invented lore such as the 'Toledo Panic Button' (an oblique reference to one of the big twists in *The Sting*) that tries to position the business of ripping off mostly innocent people as a philosophical enterprise. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Denise Di Novi

Written by

Glenn Ficarra

John Requa

Director of

Photography

Xavier Grobet

Edited by

Jan Kovac

Production Designer

Elizabeth Mickle

Music

Nick Urata

Production

Sound Mixer

Paul Ledford

Costume Designer

Dayna Pink

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Entertainment Inc.

and Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment LLC

Production

Companies

Warner Bros.

Pictures presents

in association

with Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment a

Di Novi Pictures

production

A Zagit Films

production

This production

participated in

the New York

State Governor's

Office for Motion

Picture & Television

Development's

Post Production

Credit Program

Executive Producers

Charlie Gogolak

Stan Wlodkowski

Steven Mnuchin

Cast

Will Smith

Nicky Spurgeon

Margot Robbie

Jess Barrett

Adrian Martinez

Farhad

Gerald McRaney

Owens

Rodrigo Santoro

Garriga

BD Wong

Liyuan

Brennan Brown

Horst

Robert Taylor

McEwen

Dotan Bonen

Gordon

Griff Furst

Gareth

Stephanie Honore

Janice

Dolby Digital/

Datasat

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

mischievous, unspeakable grief and, most potently, the teenage feeling of no longer being at home within your own body. The disappointment is especially acute, then, when *The Falling* turns out to have such fitful energy and hazy intentions.

Many of the film's adult performances have the caricatured flatness of children's TV, except for Maxine Peake's sculptural manifestation of a shut-in mother with an immaculate beehive coiffure, which is weirdly mesmerizing. Maisie Williams, from HBO's mega-hit fantasy series *Game of Thrones*, gives a role that might soon degenerate into Wednesday Addams schtick a real menace and nimble oddity, assisted by her arresting Russian-doll stare.

Williams plays Lydia, whose sisterly dyad with Abbie (Florence Pugh, full of nifty life) is well conjured in scenes of lakeside daydreaming and saucer-eyed recitation of Wordsworth, but even before it dissolves the tone has begun to lurch awkwardly. Morley can't decide between strategies of spooked ambiguity or dramatic illumination (an early conversation about the mysterious hills which promises some odder texture that never returns.) The fainting is at its most powerful when it's comprehended as the kind of supernatural malady found in Freud or folklore, resistant to logic and seething with sexual anxieties, but Morley removes its power with an answer that supplies the first of many fateful twists.

There are stray moments of intoxication. In its peak sequence, a school-assembly reading of the New Testament descends into a vast slow-motion rapture of twisting bodies and breathless voices, as cinematographer Agnès Godard channels all the gracefully wayward physicality found in her long collaboration with Claire Denis. Outside of Pentecostal documentaries, this is the greatest collection of erotic/ecstatic convulsions seen since *My Own Private Idaho* (1991).

Whether *The Falling* is intended as a creepily symbolic drama about what lurks on the threshold of sexual awakening, with folk-horror undergrowth heavily implied, or a study of a demonic child, or actually, something far closer in spirit to a kitchen-sink drama, complete with toxic family secrets and hysterical revelations, nobody seems to know. The film partakes in much fuzzy-headed stumbling between all three across its bloated running time. Unravelling its central mystery only to supply fresh and all too real horrors in its wake represents a fatal loss of nerve far more than it does a sudden discovery of the courage required to confront raw trauma.

What you observe in its last minutes is the peculiar spectacle of a film aching to be remembered for something, but bewildered about what exactly that should be, other than a malignant repression at its heart. If these dark disclosures are meant as explanations for Lydia's air of otherness, they don't satisfy much, precisely because they spell everything out. Strange discoveries are the crucial stuff of adolescence, but they almost never come loud and clear, all together. The eventual climax, occurring under a malevolent full moon, the rioting branches of a tree and the deep forbidden lake, is ghoulishly inventive. You can only wonder at what depth *The Falling* might have possessed had more of its secrets stayed hidden. Ⓢ

New York, present day. Inexperienced grifter Jess Barrett tries to trap Nicky Spurgeon, only to discover that he's an expert confidence trickster who easily sees through her hotel sting. Persuading Nicky to take her on as an apprentice, Jess joins the team he's put together to run scams in New Orleans during the build-up to a big football game. At the game, Nicky seems to get into a grudge contest with high-stakes gambler Liyuan, and involves Jess in a seemingly ridiculous long-shot bet that turns out to have been carefully rigged. Though Jess and Nicky begin an affair, he breaks it off, claiming

there's no place for romance in their business.

Three years later, Buenos Aires. Nicky is working for tycoon Garriga, who owns a car-racing team. Posing as a disgruntled employee, he is supposed to leak false technical information to a rival but is actually planning a more complicated heist. When Jess appears, now seemingly Garriga's girlfriend, Nicky is put off his game and caught. Garriga intends to kill Nicky and Jess, whom he believes to be working together. However, Nicky's ruthless father – and secret partner – intervenes, taking the money but saving Jess and Nicky.

Force majeure

Sweden/France/Norway/Germany/Denmark/Italy/Finland 2014

Director: Ruben Östlund

Certificate 15 119m 25s

See Feature
on page 40

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Swedish writer-director Ruben Östlund specialises in scenarios of embarrassment, or rather of something more than embarrassment. His

films, such as 2008's *Involuntary*, depict situations in which social lines are crossed irreversibly, making it almost impossible for people to go on living as they did previously – at least without having to summon all their resources of denial. Östlund is also a specialist in spectacle and appearance, in what happens when painful intimate situations are exposed to public view: in *Play* (2011), an extended incident of teenage bullying is captured by a dispassionate camera evoking that of a surveillance system.

Östlund's new film *Force majeure* acutely tracks the distance between public appearance and private truth. It begins with a scene in which a holidaying family have their photograph taken – an official picture of stability and togetherness – and continues with the moment at which this stability is radically fractured, perhaps forever. That moment, suitably, is depicted as a spectacle on a massive scale – a thunderously symphonic flourish which sets a contrasting tone for the series of chamber pieces that follow, tracking the gradual disintegration of a family man's psyche: an avalanche unexpectedly rolls down the side of a mountain, suddenly engulfing the characters in the foreground – and eventually the whole screen – in dense whiteness. It's a startling bravura episode, shown in a continuous four-and-a-half-minute shot. It is here that Tomas – his instinct seemingly working faster than his brain – performs the inadmissible act that will henceforth torment him, as he ducks away to safety while leaving his wife and children behind (more scandalously still, he nevertheless thinks fast enough to grab his mobile phone).

No one is hurt in the incident, and Tomas soon returns to his family. It's easy to miss his actions in this scene, and that's the point; he initially denies having done it, while his wife Ebba insists the opposite, although it's by no means certain she saw him clearly. Viewers certainly know the truth, if they've been paying attention. Nevertheless, a snowy haze of ambiguity continues to surround the event's status, and Ebba has to establish her case by referring to footage captured on Tomas's phone. Still, the best anyone can say in Tomas's defence – as he and his friend Mats argue – is that in the heat of the moment his survival instinct made him lose control.

Control becomes a key theme throughout the film, beginning with the avalanche scene itself, a spectacular example of the filmmaker's mastery of imagery through CGI (the scene comprises footage of an actual avalanche composited with real actors, all stitched together by a digital snow cloud that finally fills the screen). The film also depicts attempts to control nature, to fabricate a wild-seeming but safe snowscape for holidaymakers to enjoy, a perfectly managed theme park of the peaks. In a series of sinister leitmotifs, we see cannons, snow sprays and snowmobiles, all there to groom this perfect environment. But nature, both geographic and human, will follow its course. Even if the fateful avalanche was of the



Snow way out: Lisa Loven Kongsli, Johannes Bah Kuhnke

'controlled' variety, as everyone insists, it appears to have gone badly wrong, sending Tomas's compass ruinously awry in a sort of chain reaction.

Force majeure sees Östlund audaciously moving on to a much bigger canvas than in previous work. What's impressive about this film is not just that he uses the vast snowscapes to such striking visual effect, their swathes of whiteness alternately reassuring and troubling, but that the film so confidently moves between interiors and exteriors, between the slopes and the ostensibly cradling confines of the comfortable but impersonal hotel and its warm timber walls. Often, those interiors are more menacing than the outside world, not least in the family's bathroom, where Tomas and Ebba seem to be under permanent surveillance from a seeing-eye camera mysteriously invisible to us despite the room's mirrors. It is in the hotel that Tomas has

his meltdown, on an outside corridor, in full view of a hotel worker staring from the floor above (a further humiliating comic twist is that Tomas and Ebba then have to ask the man to let them into their room). Enclosure is never more terrifying than in the nightmare-like sequence in which a bewildered Tomas finds himself trapped at a club among a mass of sweaty, bare-chested male revellers: a strobe-lit dark night of the soul.

Force majeure is especially unsettling when speaking through images, and it's perhaps the weight of his country's psychodrama tradition (Strindberg, Bergman) that makes Östlund opt for some talky scenes which don't quite pack the weight of the rest, like the moments with Mats and his girlfriend Fanni, who feel just a little *de trop* in this otherwise perfectly controlled drama. It's what *isn't* said throughout *Force majeure* that is so eloquent and so deeply troubling.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Erik Hemmendorff
Marie Kjellson
Philippe Bober
Written by
Ruben Östlund
Director of Photography
Fredrik Wenzel
Editors
Ruben Östlund
Jacob Secher
Schulsinger
Production Designer
Josefin Åsberg
Music
Ola Fløttum
Sound

Kjetil Mark
Rune Van Deurs
Jesper Miller
Costume Designer
Pia Aleborg

@Plattform
Produktion AB,
Société Parisienne
de Production,
Coproduction Office
ApS, Rhône-Alpes
Cinéma, Motlys
Production Companies
Produced by
Plattform Produktion
In co-production

with Film i Väst,
Rhône-Alpes
Cinéma, Parisienne,
Coproduction Office
ApS, Motlys
With the participation
of Region Rhône-
Alpes and the CNC
With the support of
ZDF/Arte, Svenska
Filminstitutet,
Eurimages, Norsk
Filminstitut, Nordisk
Film & TV Fond, Det
Danske Filminstitut
Minor Ordningen, BLS
Business Location
Südtirol - Alto Adige,

CNC - Cinémas
du Monde
In co-operation with
ZDF/Arte, Sveriges
Television, CMore,
DR, YLE, Beofilm
Post Production
Produced with the
support of Eurimages,
MEDIA Programme of
the European Union
(MEDIA Development
Single Project, i2i
Audiovisual Grant)
Developed in
collaboration with
Ateliers du Cinéma
Européen (ACE) and

initiative supported
by the MEDIA
Programme of the
European Union
Executive Producer
Jessica Ask

Cast
Johannes Bah
Kuhnke
Tomas
Lisa Loven Kongsli
Ebba
Clara Wettergren
Vera
Vincent Wettergren
Harry

Kristofer Hivju
Mats
Fanni Metelius
Fanni

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Swedish
theatrical title
Turist

The French Alps, present day. Swedish couple Tomas and Ebba are on a ski break with their two young children. While the family is breakfasting outdoors, an avalanche erupts; Tomas runs, leaving his family behind. No one is hurt and Tomas quickly returns. That evening, Ebba mentions the incident during dinner with another couple, but Tomas denies his actions. The next day, Ebba skis alone and talks to a woman who challenges her views on marriage and monogamy. Tomas's friend Mats arrives at the ski resort with his much younger girlfriend Fanni; Ebba tells them about the incident, and

the subsequent discussion causes friction between the other couple. The next day, Tomas and Mats go skiing, but their trip ends in an uncomfortable confrontation with some younger holidaymakers. Locked out of his hotel room, Tomas is caught up in a frenzied male party crowd; returning to his family, he breaks down. When the family go skiing on their last day, Ebba gets lost – or feigns to – and Tomas rescues her, thereby saving face. Leaving the resort, the assembled holidaymakers decide to abandon their recklessly driven coach and instead walk down the mountain road.

Gente de bien

France/Colombia/Switzerland 2014
Director: Franco Lolli

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

Christmas may be seen as the season of goodwill, but goodwill comes with certain unarticulated conditions in Franco Lolli's compelling debut feature. The key here lies in the film's title: *Gente de bien* has a double meaning, referring both to good people and wealthy people, and it is in the gap between these two partial definitions that the film's power resides. *Gente de bien* is about the limits of an altruism that tests the characters' burgeoning relationships in challenging ways.

It is evident from the film's early scenes that sullen ten-year-old Eric isn't happy to be packed off by his mother to live with his carpenter father Gabriel in the latter's cramped abode in a Bogotá boarding house, where the inhabitants jostle around the cookers in the shared kitchen. Father and son have evidently not seen each other in a while, and their relationship is awkward, though Eric's shaggy dog Lupe offers a gentle bridge for communication between them. Meanwhile, at the light-filled apartment of one of Gabriel's wealthier clients, university teacher María Isabel (played by Alejandra Borrero, the only professional actor in the cast), Eric finds the space to stride and jump, to play basketball and Nintendo Wii. Taking Eric under her wing, María Isabel gives him a glimpse of a land of plenty, where trendy trainers and sporty jackets are handed to him, and where visits to the cinema and ice-cream parlours are the rule rather than the exception. At Christmas, she invites Eric and his father to spend the holiday at her country house.

For all María Isabel's good intentions, however, class schisms are never far from the surface. Eric is expected to play the submissive role of grateful, attentive child, fitting effortlessly into the spaces that María Isabel's son Francisco and his two cousins allow. Ten-year-old Eric doesn't yet have the class awareness of his diffident, introverted father and appears unwilling to learn the rules of the game. The situation is exacerbated by his impulsive rage – he has an expelative for any situation, and doesn't know when to pull away and accept defeat. This is manifest on a number of occasions, for example when he refuses to relinquish use of a neighbour's computer, or won't let Francisco take his turn putting the ball in the net when playing basketball with him. No one appears willing to deal with the deeper malaise that afflicts him: his bedwetting inspires compassion in María Isabel, but her son and his cousins use this as a way of further ostracising him, as seen in their cruel comments and games, and in the physical configurations in which Eric is repeatedly placed at the periphery of the closely positioned trio of friends.

Newcomer Brayan Santamaría gives a memorable performance as the irritable, disorientated but disarmingly funny Eric. His coarse hair, chubby face and sullen demeanour hark back to the child protagonists of Italian neorealism and Buñuel's *Los olvidados* (1950); his fierce intelligence and capacity for self-reflection ensure a nuanced characterisation that evades easy clichés. He often has a quick answer for his father and has no hesitation in informing him, moments after arriving, that the cramped boarding house does not meet his standards.



Sink or swim: Santiago Martínez, Brayan Santamaría

He grades María Isabel's students' tests faster than Francisco or his cousins can, and shows an impressive grasp of wordplay in his jokes. His amusing breakdance-like routine to the reggaeton song 'Tu cuerpo me llama' ('Your Body Calls Me') offers a rare moment of early bonding between father and son, as Eric tries to come to terms with the disorientation of his new domestic arrangements. His aching desire to perform in front of María Isabel's family at the country house is plainly linked to a need to belong.

While Bogotá is a palpable presence in the film, Lolli eschews wide shots in favour of brief glimpses of the busy, crowded area where Gabriel lives and the more expansive environments of María Isabel's bright apartment and spacious country house. In this, as in the economy of his storytelling, Lolli demonstrates a quiet maturity, steering clear of affected

judgements, simplistic binaries or easy resolutions. Tellingly, María Isabel is first seen arguing loudly with her daughter – there are no idealised happy families in *Gente de bien*.

Lolli's impressive debut employs the power of suggestion to propel the narrative. Extended conversations between the children expose the class-based assumptions that drive a sense of social superiority on the part of Francisco and his friends and that progressively alienate Eric. Borrero and Carlos Fernando Pérez give shaded performances as María Isabel and Gabriel. Her bustling demeanour is contrasted with his languid body language, and her insistence on altruism is as exasperating as his wasteful inactivity in the local bar. *Gente de bien* shows us the limits both of María Isabel's bountiful kindheartedness and Gabriel's dogged sense of pride. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Grégoire Debailly

Producers

Grégoire Debailly

Franco Lolli

Screenplay

Franco Lolli

Catherine Paillé

With the collaboration of

Virginie Legeay

Director of Photography

Oscar Durán

Editor

Nicolas Desmaison

Julie Duclaux

Art Direction

Marcela Gómez

Sound

Matthieu Perrot

Josefina Rodríguez

Samuel Aichoun

Costume Designer

Marcela Gómez

Montoya

@Geko Films and

Evidencia Films

Production Companies

Geko Films and

Evidencia Films

present

in collaboration

with Versatile

in co-production

with EFD Colombia

With the support

of Fondo para el

Desarrollo

Cinematográfico

- Colombia, La

Fondation Gan pour

le Cinéma, Visions

Sud Est supported

by COSUDE/

SDC - Swiss Agency

for Development

and Cooperation

Région Île-de-

France, Région

Basse-Normandie,

Maison de l'Image

Basse-Normandie,

Ciclic - Région Centre

In association with Le

Centre National de la

Cinématographie et

de l'Image Animée

A film by Franco Lolli

Associate producers:

Epithète Films,

Séptima Films

A Geko Films and

Evidencia Films

production

With the participation

of Ad Vitam

Developed in

collaboration with

Talleres de Cine

Europeo (ACE), an

initiative of the MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union

With the support

of Cinéfondation

- La Résidence

Cast

Brayan Santamaría

Eric Santamaría

Carlos Fernando

Pérez

Gabriel, Eric's father

Alejandra Borrero

María Isabel

Adriana Santos

Myriam, Eric's mother

Nasly Rueda

Myriam's daughter

Sofía Rivas

Juana

Santiago Martínez

Francisco

Diosilvia Cardona

Marta, aunt

Juan David Lovera

Juan David, cousin

Yubell Cardona

Carolina, cousin

Lupe

Lupe the dog

In Colour

[1.66:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Signature

Entertainment

Bogotá, the present. Ten-year-old Eric has been sent by his mother to stay with his father Gabriel, a carpenter, even though they have seen little of each other in recent years; Eric takes with him his dog Lupe. Living in a noisy boarding house in a poor quarter of the city, Gabriel struggles to make ends meet, and Eric resents the basic living conditions. Eric sees a different side to the city when he is taken to the home of one of Gabriel's clients, middle-class university teacher María Isabel, who is keen to help the pair out. María Isabel encourages Eric to play with her son Francisco, but there are evident tensions and these come to a

head when María Isabel invites Gabriel and Eric to her country house for Christmas. Gabriel is ostensibly employed to do a series of odd jobs around the house so that he can earn the money needed to move out of his cramped accommodation, but he is increasingly unsettled by the atmosphere in the house. He agrees to leave Eric with María Isabel and return to the city. Increasingly ostracised by Francisco and his two cousins, Eric lashes out angrily at María Isabel, and she returns him to his father. Back in Bogotá, Eric finds that Lupe is ill; the vet diagnoses cancer, and father and son agree to have the dog put down.

Good Kill

USA 2014
Director: Andrew Niccol
Certificate 15 102m 29s

Reviewed by Tom Webb

After 2011's ill-received Justin Timberlake vehicle *In Time*, *Good Kill* is a welcome return to the confident filmmaking that made Andrew Niccol's name, as seen in his 1997 directorial debut *Gattaca* and his script for 1998's widely lauded reality-TV foreteller *The Truman Show*. Attempting to highlight the West's conflicted feelings about the increasingly unpopular War on Terror, *Good Kill* finds him once again taking to the issue-driven cinema that sits at the heart of his work. The questions that Niccol's film poses without perhaps ultimately answering are: what was the fair response to 9/11, and what is the human cost to the individuals charged with maintaining the West's freedom?

During the early years of the supposedly more liberal Obama administration, Ethan Hawke's former fighter pilot Major Tommy Egan spends his days at an airbase somewhere in Nevada, with his head 7,000 miles away in the remarkably similar terrain of the Afghan desert: he attacks designated Taliban sites via pilotless drones, in many cases targeting men, women and children who may not have actually done anything wrong – he can't know for certain. He lives in a strangely fabricated suburb outside Las Vegas with his wife Molly (January Jones) and their two children, as emotionally distanced from them as he is physically remote from the overseas conflict, drifting ever further from the domestic American Dream that he's supposedly fighting for.

Niccol's directing style situates a constantly pensive Egan at the centre of a series of close-ups and tightly composed frames, invoking a claustrophobia that's further accentuated by the stark desert location, the barbed-wire fences and the isolated military housing complexes. Even the fleeting images of nearby Las Vegas appear as a circumstantial and ignorable backdrop. Niccol thus creates a distance between viewer and story, allowing the focus to fall squarely on what he has to say about the dangers that modern warfare poses to society. At times this is at the expense of fully developed characterisation, particularly among the supporting cast: Egan's team is composed of two opposing



Striking out: Ethan Hawke

factions (for and against drone warfare), which highlight his own moral conflict, while wife Molly could be regarded as a prop to measure his growing distance from reality. There is no doubt that drone warfare is topical and controversial, but Niccol's focus on the issue, and the validity of Egan's actions, could appear too unequivocal to engage its audience fully.

Niccol has as much to say about the influence of first-person shoot-'em-up computer games as he does about the state of modern warfare and the cost of living in supposed freedom. While Egan is old enough to have flown actual planes, we are told that the new recruits are drawn from shopping-mall arcades rather than military backgrounds, so that the line between videogames and real life becomes increasingly blurred. Whereas Egan struggles to adjust to the displaced nature of drone warfare, the film invites us to consider how easy it will be for a young expert gamer to distance himself from firing missiles at Taliban targets, and the innocent civilians who surround them for real. **S**

The Good Lie

USA/India 2014
Director: Philippe Falardeau
Certificate 12A 109m 52s

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

Given the abundance of noble intentions surrounding *The Good Lie*, the misleading marketing campaign for the film in North America seemed especially unfortunate, if sadly inevitable. In the most prominent poster for director Philippe Falardeau and screenwriter Margaret Nagle's largely respectful and intelligent drama about a group of Sudanese refugees struggling to adjust to new lives in America, the smiling face of Reese Witherspoon dominates the prime real estate. In the picture below, their backs to the viewer, the three tiny African men in traditional garb are nearly swallowed up in the vastness of the savanna.

However much one may cringe over the decision to prioritise the image of a white movie star at the expense of lesser-known, darker-skinned cast members, it's more welcome to see that *The Good Lie* eschews other tactics typical of North American filmmakers trying to tell African stories. For one thing, it's clear from the onset that Witherspoon's character Carrie is only a peripheral player in the narrative. Indeed, she doesn't make her first appearance until after the principals have already survived not only the threats posed by rebel soldiers and lions but also the brutal conditions of their trek to safety and the more routine deprivations of life in a Kenyan refugee camp. Once introduced, Carrie still performs some of the functions customary for onscreen surrogates for under-informed western moviegoers – including plugging 'Sudan' into an internet search engine – but Witherspoon seems eager to cede the attention.

Fortunately, the film's tenor is defined more by Arnold Oceng's finely modulated performance as refugee Mamere. A Ugandan-born, London-bred actor who's been working steadily since a teenage stint on *Grange Hill*, Oceng conveys Mamere's fundamental decency while also making clear the effect that the traumas of war and exile – and the discovery of his new home's capacity for cruelty and hypocrisy – have had on him. That last point is forcefully made when Mamere loses his job at a grocery store for giving expired food to a homeless woman rather than put it in the trash as directed. His reserved manner adds power to his occasional demonstrations of anger, despair and survivor guilt: "When people we love die and we don't," he wonders at one point, "what can that mean?"

Oceng's efforts are well complemented by those of Emmanuel Jal and Ger Duany, both of whom experienced many of the same trials as their characters during their childhoods in South Sudan. (Duany also made a memorable appearance as a former 'Lost Boy of Sudan' living more happily in America in David O. Russell's *I Heart Huckabees*.)

Though *The Good Lie* squeezes a little too much easy humour out of the trio's expressions of bewilderment at western mores and Carrie's status as a working single woman – "May you find a husband to fill your empty house," Mamere tells her with the utmost sincerity – the film stops well short of becoming condescending. Perhaps that's because Falardeau, a French-Canadian director who

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nicolas Chartier
Zev Foreman
Mark Amin
Andrew Niccol

Written by
Andrew Niccol

Director of

Photography

Amir Mokri

Editor

Zach Staenberg

Production Designer

Guy Barnes

Music

Christophe Beck

Sound Mixer

David Brownlow

Costume Designer

Lisa Jensen

©Clear Skies

Nevada, LLC

Production

Companies

Voltage Pictures

presents a Voltage/
Sobini Films
production
A film by Andrew
Niccol

Executive Producers

Patrick Newall

Ted Gidlow

Camie Winikoff

Cast

Ethan Hawke

Major Tom Egan,

'Tommy'

Bruce Greenwood

Lieutenant

Colonel Johns

Zoë Kravitz

Airman Vera Suarez

Jake Abel

Specialist Zimmer

January Jones

Molly Egan

Dolby Digital

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Arrow Films

US, 2010. From an army base in Nevada, Major Tommy Egan pilots unmanned drones, targeting Taliban extremists in the Middle East. Egan's co-pilot deliberately sabotages a mission and is replaced by the much younger Vera Suarez. Aware that he is becoming distanced from his wife and children, Egan wants to leave the army and fly real planes again, but his senior officers won't allow it. The CIA takes over Egan's unit and begins targeting those who have shown certain patterns of behaviour. The attacks increase and Egan reacts by secretly drinking. The members of the unit disagree over the new assignment and argue about the legality of their actions. In trying to make amends, they all go drinking together and Egan nearly kisses Suarez. Later, Egan sees his wife with another man, which leads to a huge argument. His secret drinking increases and he turns up to work drunk. On the next mission, he deliberately misses the target and is demoted. The same day, his wife leaves him, taking the children. On his final mission, Egan shoots and kills a rapist, against orders, and leaves the compound and the army, to try to reunite with his family.

The Gunman

Spain/United Kingdom/USA/
France/Luxembourg 2015
Director: Pierre Morel, Certificate 15 115m Os

Reviewed by Richard T. Kelly

In the 20 years since Sean Penn resumed a mercurial acting career formerly stalled by incarceration and the urge to quit in favour of directing, he has been many marvellous things on screen but never a shoot-'em-up action hero – better known, in fact, for turning down the sorts of opportunities offered by Jerry Bruckheimer or Joel Silver. But that was then and this is now, a long time later.

Ten years ago – circa Hurricane Katrina – saw the start of the heavy-lifting humanitarian-activist phase of Penn's career, exemplified by his managing a tented camp in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. Penn's thoroughgoing immersion in the world of NGOs and relief work – and the overheads involved in that life – go some way to explaining why audiences now get to see him in *The Gunman*, a Joel Silver picture directed by Pierre Morel, whose *Taken* put such a spring back into Liam Neeson's career that every January we're treated to Neeson shooting up people anew.

Penn is unarguably one of the great screen actors, but still, after all this time, not really a 'movie star'. Filmgoers rely on him to realise compromised characters they don't have to like, rather than endearing tough guys they can root for. In *The Gunman*, though, Morel shoots his lead like a star, frequently bare-chested, and Penn is in every scene.

The source material is *The Prone Gunman* by the late cult novelist Jean-Patrick Manchette, but fans of that book will barely sniff its influence here. The screenplay credit goes to an unlikely triumvirate – Don MacPherson, Pete Travis and Penn – from which one infers a fair bit of repurposed material. The picture is bookended by pretend BBC news bulletins, critical of the venal behaviours of multinational companies in 'the developing world'. But the genre exacts its price on that moral tone, and *The Gunman* employs the Democratic Republic of Congo rather slackly, a point of departure for the stock stuff of a conscience-haunted hitman trying to learn who wants to kill him and why. Penn is never uninteresting to watch, but there's something wistful in seeing an actor who has so dedicatedly put so many truthful moments on screen in a picture where scarcely any such moments are attainable.

The fight scenes are fairly blistering and Marco Beltrami's score pulses and ticks, but the pace can't prevent a certain failure of suspense that ensues from the narrative arousing some very familiar hunches about potential culprits and motives, then paying out on these in full. *Taken* worked as it did because



Floor and order: Sean Penn



Long walk to freedom: Ger Duany, Arnold Oceng, Kuoth Wiel

gained international prominence with another refugee story, Oscar nominee *Monsieur Lazhar* (2011), has a similarly alien regard for the grim apartment blocks and drab service-industry jobs that represent the trio's entry points to America. And while a climactic sacrifice also

smacks of screenwriterly neatness – the notion of the 'good lie' having been introduced in a lecture on Huckleberry Finn lying to save Jim – it seems a forgivable compromise in light of the unfussy naturalism and generosity of spirit that distinguish the rest of the film. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Ron Howard
Brian Grazer
Karen Kehela
Sherwood
Molly Smith
Thad Luckinbill
Trent Luckinbill
Written by
Margaret Nagle
Director of
Photography
Ronald Plante
Edited by

Richard Comeau
Production Designer
Aaron Osborne
Music
Martin Léon
Production
Sound Mixer
Chris Durfy
Costume Designer
Suttirat Anne Larlarb

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Production Companies
Alcon Entertainment,
Imagine
Entertainment and
Black Label Media
present a Black
Label Media, Imagine
Entertainment
and Reliance
Entertainment
production
Made with assistance
from the GA Film,

Music & Digital
Entertainment Office
With the participation
of the Canadian
Film Production
Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Andrew A. Kosove
Broderick Johnson
Kim Roth
Ellen H. Schwartz
Deepak Nayar
Bobby Newmyer
Deb Newmyer

Cast
Reese Witherspoon
Carrie Davis
Arnold Oceng
Mamere
Ger Duany
Jeremiah
Emmanuel Jal
Paul
Corey Stoll
Jack
Kuoth Wiel
Abital

Femi Oguns
Theo
Dolby Digital/
Datasat
In Colour
Prints by
DeLuxe
[1.85:1]
Part-subtitled
Distributor
E1 Films

South Sudan, mid-80s. Mamere and Theo, sons of the chief of a rural village, escape a massacre by militiamen. Now orphans, they begin a 1,000-mile trek to safety. During an encounter with a rebel platoon, Theo allows himself to be captured in order to protect his younger brother and others. Mamere survives the journey's hardships and spends the next 13 years in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Along with his friends Jeremiah, Paul and Abital, the now adult Mamere is offered the chance to settle in the US, where he hopes to study medicine. However, the three men are disappointed to learn that because Abital is a woman, she will be sent to a family in a different city.

Mamere, Paul and Jeremiah arrive in Kansas City, Missouri, and are greeted by Carrie Davis, a counsellor tasked with helping them to find work.

She soon realises that, bewildered by almost every aspect of American society, they will need more assistance. Jeremiah finds strength in his Christian faith but Mamere feels continuing guilt over Theo's sacrifice. After smoking marijuana with co-workers, Paul becomes distanced from his friends and bristles at Mamere's continuing authority over the group. Their situation improves when Carrie reunites them with Abital, who tells Mamere about a letter from a man in the Kakuma camp claiming to be Theo.

Mamere returns to Africa and finds his brother, who recounts his brutal experiences as a conscripted soldier. Failing to secure the documents he needs for Theo's journey to the US, Mamere compels his brother to impersonate him and take his place. Mamere resumes his work at the camp's hospital.

the bad guys didn't really know and didn't especially care that ageing dad Neeson was coming to reclaim his daughter and kill them all. Here, one keeps feeling that Penn's Jim Terrier ought really to stray into some sniper's crosshairs. If thrillers today were made less in the hope of creating a 'returning character' and rather more like they were in the 1970s – as Penn quite possibly wishes – then a shadowy Parallax-like organisation would surely have rubbed Jim out by the third reel. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Andrew Rona Ron Halpern Sean Penn	Companies Studiocanal presents in association with Anton Capital Entertainment S.C.A. a Silver Pictures production A co-production Nostromo Pictures, Prone Gunman AIE and Prone Gunman Limited in co-production with TF1 Films Production with the participation of Canal+, TF1 and Amazon Prime	of ANTENA 3 Televisión, Canal + España, Televisió de Catalunya, S.A
Screenplay Don MacPherson Pete Travis Sean Penn Based upon the novel <i>The Prone Gunman</i> by Jean- Patrick Manchette	Executive Producers Steve Richards Aaron Auch Peter McAleese Adrian Guerra Olivier Courson	Executive Producers Steve Richards Aaron Auch Peter McAleese Adrian Guerra Olivier Courson
Director of Photography Flavio Labiano	Cast Sean Penn Jim Terrier Idris Elba Barnes Ray Winstone Stanley Mark Rylance Cox Jasmine Trinca Annie Peter Franzen Reiniger Javier Bardem Felix	Cast Sean Penn Jim Terrier Idris Elba Barnes Ray Winstone Stanley Mark Rylance Cox Jasmine Trinca Annie Peter Franzen Reiniger Javier Bardem Felix
Film Editor Frederic Thoraval	Production Designer Andrew Laws	Dolby Digital/ Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]
Sound Mixer Colin Nicolson	Music Marco Beltrami	Distributor Studiocanal Limited
Costume Designer Jill Taylor	Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator/Fight Choreographer Markos Rounthwaite	
Production @Prone Gunman AIE, Nostromo Pictures SL, Prone Gunman Limited		

The Democratic Republic of Congo, 2006. Jim Terrier and his colleagues Felix and Cox – ostensibly private security guards protecting aid workers including Jim's girlfriend Annie – are in fact covert employees of a foreign mining company. Felix selects Jim to carry out 'Project Calvary' – the assassination of a government minister threatening the company's interests. After the assassination, Jim has to flee the country, leaving Annie in Felix's care.

In 2014, Terrier is back in DRC working for an NGO. He survives a murder attempt by armed locals and heads to London to visit Cox, now an executive for their former employer. Cox fears that the old Calvary team may be marked men. Jim is helped reluctantly by former colleague Stan, but starts to suffer unconscious episodes arising from work-related stress. He travels to Barcelona to see Felix, now married to Annie, who is unhappy and resumes her romance with Jim. Felix summons assassins to kill Jim but dies himself in the attack, during which Jim saves Annie before confessing to her his part in the Calvary project. Stan advises Jim that Cox is plotting to erase evidence of his employer's past crimes. Jim goes to Gibraltar to confront Cox, first encountering Interpol agent Barnes and then surviving a hit arranged by Cox. The latter murders Stan and kidnaps Annie. Jim reveals that he has video evidence implicating Cox in Calvary; an exchange is set up at a bullfight, where Jim kills more assassins, rescues Annie and shoots Cox, who is fatally gored by a bull. Jim surrenders to Barnes, serves a prison sentence and, on his release, is reunited with Annie.

Harlock Space Pirate

Japan 2014

Director: Aramaki Shinji

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Five years in the making, *Harlock: Space Pirate* is a sumptuous update of a 38-year-old manga – later a cult TV anime – by comics luminary Matsumoto Leiji. Its eponymous antihero – first seen iconically framed against a blood-red sky like *Mad Max 2*'s Road Warrior – is a former government agent turned outlaw who's been literally immortalised following an ingestion of dark matter. Fittingly, darker shades have been applied to the character here by screenwriters Fukui Harutoshi and Takeuchi Kiyoto, giving Harlock greater ambiguity and ruthlessness than in prior incarnations.

Plot – involving the younger brother of a government stooge being assigned to infiltrate Harlock's invincible Arcadia spaceship (an interstellar Flying Dutchman with a giant skull for a bridge) – is strictly serviceable, with echoes of thematic elements from the likes of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Battlestar Galactica*. But the real draw is the painstakingly detailed CGI animation, which utilises complex facial motion-capture technology for the first time in anime. The story gets bogged down late on with the shifting loyalties between Harlock and his protégé, but the pacy, stylish direction of Aramaki Shinji (*Appleseed*) suggests there's plenty of fuel left in the tank for a resurgent franchise. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ikezawa Yoshi	Motion Capture Mozoo	Voice Cast David Matranga Harlock Adam Gibbs Logan Emily Neves Mimmy Jessica Boone Kei Rob Mungle Yulian Mike Yager Ezra Rebekah Stevens Nami
Producers Kudo Rei Chou Joseph <i>English Version:</i> Joey Goubeaud	Production Companies Toei Company, Ltd. Toei Animation, Marza Animation Planet, GFM Films Captain Harlock Film Partners: Toei Animation Co., Ltd., Sammy Corporation, Kinoshita Holdings Co., Ltd., Toei Co., Ltd., Toei Video Co., Ltd	In Colour [2.35:1]
Screenplay Fukui Harutoshi Takeuchi Kiyoto	Executive Producers Kitazaki Hiromi Fukazawa Koichi <i>Creative:</i> Morishita Kozo Shimizu Shinji Oguchi Hisao <i>Chief:</i> Tagaki Katsuhiro Nakayama Keishi Kinoshita Naoya Muramatsu Hidenobu Mamiya Toramatsu	Distributor Manga Entertainment UK
Story Adapted by Fukui Harutoshi Based on original characters and stories created by Matsumoto Leiji		
English Screenplay Adaptation Steven Foster Editor Miyamura Ryui Art Director Ueno Hiroaki Music Takahashi Tetsuya Sound Design Kasamatsu Koji Animation Supervisor Tanaka Tsuyoshi Animation Production Toei Animation		

The far future. A devastating war has led to Earth being declared off-limits by the corrupt Gaia Coalition. Gaia agent Ezra sends his brother Logan to infiltrate the Arcadia, the ship of immortal space pirate Harlock, who plans to use detonators to reverse time and restore Earth. When Harlock saves his life, Logan joins the fight against Gaia. Ezra reveals that Harlock once worked for Gaia, but used dark matter to ruin Earth after discovering that the elite were secretly repopulating the planet. Logan finds flowers growing on the scorched Earth; he convinces Harlock to abandon the detonations. Ezra helps the Arcadia to prevent Gaia from destroying Earth.

Hot Tub Time Machine 2

USA 2015

Director: Steve Pink

Certificate 15 93m 16s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The two things 2010's *Hot Tub Time Machine* had going for it were the budget to nail 80s fashions and clothes for each and every extra, and the weary melancholy of John Cusack – partially his character's, seemingly partially the actor's own at realising what his career had come to. Cusack sits this round out (explanation: his character is on an 'experiential journey') and the film jumps forward ten years, so one imagines that it is going to be even worse than its loathsome predecessor. Oddly, it's a slight improvement.

Via the titular device, the first film unimaginatively combined *Back to the Future* and the winter-town-dystopia of *It's a Wonderful Life*, leaving schmuck suicide risk Lou Dorchon (Rob Corddry) in 1986 to use his foreknowledge of the future to create Google, write Mötley Crüe songs and become wealthy. This sequel is a redemption narrative for Lou, a true jerk with a massive substance-abuse problem whose single-register yelling grows old instantly.

Relocated from then economical Vancouver to now-even-more-economical New Orleans, the sequel makes little production-design sport of 'the future' and doubles down on the original's gay panic, again staging a sequence in which the prospect of homosexual intercourse conducted in public under the threat of physical harm is presumably infinitely hilarious. There is some compensation in the film's apparently real melancholy at a life of manic partying conducted as inadequate solace for a severely disappointing existence and the faint hope, realisable only through fantasy, that second chances may still exist. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Andrew Panay	Un film de Steve Pink	Datasat In Colour [2.35:1]
Written by Josh Heald Based on characters created by Josh Heald	Executive Producers Ben Ormand Rob Corddry Matt Moore	Distributor Paramount Pictures UK
Director of Photography Declan Quinn	Cast Rob Corddry Lou Dorchon Craig Robinson Nick Clark Duke Jacob Adam Scott Adam Jr Gillian Jacobs Jill Chevy Chase hot tub repairman Collette Wolfe Kelly Bianca Haase Sophie Jason D Jones Gary Winkle Kelle Stewart Courtney Kumail Nanjiani Brad	
Edited by Jamie Gross	Production Designer Ryan Berg	Dolby Digital/
Sound Mixer Michael B. Koff	Chief: Christophe Beck	
Costume Designer Carol Cutshall	Production Sound Mixer Michael B. Koff	
	Companies Paramount Pictures and Metro- Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures presents	

New Orleans, the present. When millionaire Lou Dorchon is killed at his own party, his friends try to travel to the past to prevent the murder. Travelling instead to the future, they discover that the killer was someone enraged by Lou's awful conduct. They return to the present, where amends are made.

John Wick

USA 2014
Director: Chad Stahelski
Certificate 15 101m 2s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Any given year a half-dozen or more well-crafted action movies will come along, often treated to the critical disdain and incomprehension that have always surrounded genre work. *John Wick*, to be very clear, is not one of those fine, inexplicably disdained films. Nevertheless, since being released stateside last autumn, this vehicle for middle-aged Keanu Reeves, playing a hitman lured out of retirement, has been treated in certain circles as nothing less than the film to finally merge *Point Blank* and *Point Break*.

When lanky, surfer-boy handsome Reeves appeared in films such as *Point Break* (1991) and *Speed* (1994), he was a figure who actually fitted that shopworn piece of PR hype: a new breed of action hero. No great shakes as a line-reader, Keanu nonetheless seemed to embody the ethos of an era and, like another such figure, Elliott Gould, never seemed entirely at home in movies made afterwards. Now 50, he has become one of those actors who begin to resemble their own Madame Tussauds dummy, like Samuel L. Jackson or Nicolas Cage, whose failure to appear in a sub-*Bangkok Dangerous* affair like *John Wick* is nothing short of inexplicable.


John Wick is the directorial debut of veteran stunt coordinator Chad Stahelski. As one might expect, the movie contains some very impressive rough-and-tumble fight work, much of it evidently performed by Reeves himself. Stahelski is rather too enamoured of headshots accompanied by CGI spray for my liking – nothing can replace the old-fashioned strawberry-jam squib – but this is a mere quibble, and the real problems with *John Wick* lie elsewhere.

Primarily, it's a matter of tone. *John Wick* belongs to a certain self-parodic subset of the action genre that I'd be tempted to call 'badass camp' were it not for the fact that this fails to communicate the total mirthlessness of the movie. Wick as we encounter him is understandably dour, though a few details given about his background suggest happier days in the past. He is still deeply attached to his recently deceased wife – a fact signified by repeated scenes in which he stares at a video of a day they spent together at the beach, so indifferently conceived that one wonders why



Dog slay afternoon: Keanu Reeves

the filmmaker bothered with it at all. Whether Wick's renunciation of killing has anything to do with the tattoos of Christian imagery that we see decorating his body, we never learn. I suspect they're there, like almost everything else in this movie besotted with expensive-looking things, because they look cool.

Stahelski, by way of screenwriter Derek Kolstad, doesn't have a philosophy, he only has postures. "There's no rhyme or reason to this life, it's just days like today scattered among the rest," a former colleague tells Wick – and because the line is delivered by Willem Dafoe, you barely notice the triteness. The most memorable piece of 'dialogue' comes from Marilyn Manson's 'Killing Strangers', used to score one of the film's set pieces: "We're killing strangers so we don't kill the ones that we love." The sentiment is never connected to Wick's rage or his past married life but is, again, purely decorative. And while shallowness alone doesn't damn a movie to perdition, it makes a bitter cocktail when combined with humourlessness and a really nasty streak – you have to wonder about a film that's willing to sacrifice a beagle puppy to establish its take-no-prisoners bona fides. 


Kidnapping Freddy Heineken

Belgium/USA/The Netherlands/United Kingdom 2014
Director: Daniel Alfredson, Certificate 15 94m 42s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

In *Kidnapping Freddy Heineken*, Anthony Hopkins is chained up in a white room, snapping at his captors. It's a sight that evokes Hannibal Lecter – a resonance that director Daniel Alfredson surely intended, even though his fact-based thriller has nothing to do with serial killers. A dramatisation of events leading up to and following the 1983 abduction of the Dutch brewing magnate Freddy Heineken by a crew of inexperienced criminals, the film plays up its namesake's famed upper-crust imperiousness, contrasting it with the rough edges of the men holding him hostage, and suggesting that when it comes to psychological warfare, Hopkins's character has the upper hand – even when it's manacled and latched to the wall.

Like Michael Bay's similarly fact-based *Pain & Gain* (2013), *Kidnapping Freddy Heineken* is a movie about the gap between physical and economic strength. Willem Holleeder (Sam Worthington) and Cor van Hout (Jim Sturgess) are hardy lads with strong hands and a desire to build a business from the ground up, but they can't get a loan from any of Amsterdam's banks and opt for Plan B – kidnapping one of the wealthiest men in the Netherlands and squeezing his company for big bucks. There's an element of pathos to their plan – Willem's father was laid off by Heineken's brewery – but mostly the script frames things as a story of unfortunately misdirected ambition. Considering the efficiency with which Willem, Cor and their friends pull off the initial crime and keep a celebrity billionaire safely out of view for weeks at a time, the implication is that they'd have done pretty well with a more legitimate enterprise.

The parable of have-nots whose moral compasses have become demagnetised by greed is sound, and the film is solid enough on a technical level: it's been crisply shot on location in Amsterdam and percussively edited, with fewer time-killing scenes of handwringing and recrimination than one might expect from the genre. And Hopkins is a lot of fun as Heineken, who refuses to kowtow to his kidnappers and registers as a strangely menacing presence even when he's off screen. The problem is that Sturgess and Worthington don't make for particularly compelling rogues, and their collaborators are so thinly sketched as 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Basil Iwanyk
David Leitch
Eva Longoria
Michael Witherrill

Written by

Derek Kolstad

Director of

Photography

Jonathan Sela

Editor

Elisabet Ronalds

Production Designer

Dan Leigh

Music

Tyler Bates

Joel J. Richard

Production Mixer

Danny Michael

Costume Designer

Luca Mosca

Stunt Co-ordinator

Darrin Prescott

Fight Co-ordinator

Jonathan Eusebio

©PPNY, Inc.

Production

Companies

Summit

Entertainment and

Thunder Road present

in association with

87Eleven Productions

and MJW Films

in association with

Defy/Nite Films

Executive Producers

Peter Lawson

Mike Upton

Joseph Vincenti

Erica Lee

Kevin Frakes

Raj Singh

Tara Moross

Darren Blumenthal

Jared D. Underwood

Andrew C. Robinson

Sam X. Eyde

Cast

Keanu Reeves

John Wick

Michael Nyqvist

Viggo Tarasov

Alfie Allen

Iosef Tarasov

Adrianne Palicki

Ms Perkins

Bridget Moynahan

Helen

Dean Winters

Avi

Lance Reddick

Charon, hotel

manager

Toby Leonard Moore

Victor

Ian McShane

Winston

John Leguizamo

Aurelio

Willem Dafoe

Marcus

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

New Jersey, present day. Retired hitman John Wick, recently widowed, receives a puppy as a posthumous gift from his wife. When the dog is killed by Russian mobsters, Wick swears revenge. He traces the crime to Iosef, whose father Viggo is head of the Russian mob in New York, and also Wick's former employer. After eliminating a hit squad sent by Viggo, Wick checks into

a New York hotel that caters exclusively to professional killers. After surviving two attempts on his own life, Wick kills Iosef. In retribution, Viggo assassinates Wick's friend Marcus. Wick speeds to intercept Viggo, who is on his way out of the city. He waylays Viggo, kills his henchmen and finishes off Viggo himself. Wounded, Wick breaks into an animal shelter and emerges with a new dog, a pit bull.



Trouble brewing: Sam Worthington, Jim Sturgess

to be interchangeable. (It hardly seems necessary for the men to hide behind ski masks when they're talking to their prisoner, because they're all so blurry in the first place.)

A late bid to give the action some emotional stakes in the form of Cor's pregnant wife may be faithful to history but feels utterly perfunctory, while a closing title card about two of the characters' unlikely fates is surprising primarily because it doesn't seem to connect in any way with their portrayal in the film. *Kidnapping Freddy Heineken* is perfectly serviceable but it doesn't teem with the stranger-than-fiction energy of a movie such as *Pain & Gain*, which emphasised the absurdity of its scenario until it felt hallucinatory. Here, Alfredson plays things totally straight, and while it's hard to criticise his choices, there isn't much to celebrate either. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Michael A. Simpson
Howard Meltzer
Judy Cairo

Written by

William Brookfield
Based on the book
*The Kidnapping of
Alfred Heineken* by
Peter R. de Vries

Director of

Photography

Frederik Backer

Editor

Håkan Karlsson

Production

Designers

Hubert Pouille
Chris Stull

Music

Lucas Vidal

Sound Mixer

Dirk Bombeij

Costume Designer

Catherine Van Brée

Stunt Co-ordinator

Willem de Beukelaer

©Informant Europe
SPRL, Heineken
Finance, LLC

Production

Companies

Informant

Media presents

in association

with Global Film

Partners and

Embankment Films

an Informant

Europe production

In association

with European

Film Company

and Umedia

Financing provided

by Informant

Europe and Global

Film Partners

in association

with uFund

Tax Credit Financing

provided by National

Bank of Canada

and Three Point

Capital, LLC

Produced with

interim financing

by National

Bank of Canada

-TV and Motion

Picture Group

Supported by the

Tax Shelter of the

Federal Government

of Belgium and the

Tax Shelter Investors

Executive

Producers

Eric Brenner

Grant Guthrie

Sandra Siegal

Paul B. Loyd, Jr

Sam Solakyan

Darrel Casalino

Tim Haslam

Hugo Grumbar

Adrian Politowski

Gilles Waterkeyn

Rob Van Den Berg

Cast

Jim Sturgess

Cor van Hout

Sam Worthington

Willem Holleeder

Ryan Kwanten

Jan Boellard, 'Cat'

Anthony Hopkins

Freddy Heineken

Mark van Eeuwen

Frans Meijer, 'Spikes'

Thomas Cocquerel

Martin Erkampe,

'Brakes'

Jerimma West

Isabelle Lightwood

David Dencik

Ab Doderer

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Signature

Entertainment

Amsterdam, 1983. Willem, Cor, Martin, Jan and Frans are childhood friends now in their twenties and hoping to start a business. Cor is married to Willem's sister Sonia. The men are denied a bank loan and decide to abduct and ransom Alfred 'Freddy' Heineken, a brewing-company magnate worth billions of dollars. Willem is especially keen because Heineken's company fired his father years ago. The group rob a bank to acquire the funds to pull off a professional kidnapping job, and use the money to build a safe house on the edge of town. The kidnapping is successful, and they hold Heineken and his driver, Ab Doderer, for three weeks before the company decides to pay out; during that time, the members of the gang suffer from tensions and doubts about what they've done. After retrieving the money at the drop-off, they are pursued by policemen, who have been tipped off anonymously; they bury some of the money and go their separate ways, but they are apprehended one by one, culminating in Cor and Willem being arrested in Paris.

A closing title informs us that Cor and Willem went on to become Dutch crime lords after they got out of prison, and that a sizeable portion of the money was never recovered.

The Last 5 Years

USA 2013

Director: Richard LaGravenese

Certificate 12A 94m 25s



The cheat that my heart skipped: Anna Kendrick, Jeremy Jordan

Reviewed by Kate Stables

After a decade or so in the doldrums, film musicals have been enjoying a sustained revival in the past few years. Devising new ways to give big hit stage-to-screen musicals an updated visual and thematic approach, *Chicago* (2002) lit the fuse, then *Mamma Mia!* (2008) rocketed to global success, followed by *Sweeney Todd* (2007), *Les Misérables* (2012) and recently *Into the Woods*. Yet there's a small-scale strand of modern musical theatre that's rarely seen on screen, since it's off Hollywood's pop-culture radar.

Director Richard LaGravenese laboured for seven years to bring Jason Robert Brown's cult-following, two-person shoestring musical to the screen, pitching it to investors as a bittersweet romance in the style (if not on the

scale) of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). A semi-autobiographical story about the heady delights and painful decay of a New York starter marriage between suddenly successful novelist Jamie (Jeremy Jordan) and struggling actress Cathy (Anna Kendrick), it's a sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued and often melancholy piece. That it's a labour of love is obvious from LaGravenese's carefully tailored adaptation, which follows the plot's shifting emotional currents faithfully and retains plenty of in-jokes about the travails of Ohio summer stock for the theatre geeks. If it's too inclined to treat the stage version as holy writ, this version still manages to do something fresh and intimate with it.

Since all the scenes are sung-through monologues by either husband or wife

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Lauren Versel
Kurt Deutsch

Richard LaGravenese

Janet Brenner

Written for the

screen by

Richard LaGravenese

Based on the

musical by Jason

Robert Brown

Director of

Photography

Editor

Sabine Hoffman

Production Designer

Michael Fitzgerald

Production

Sh-K-Boom

Entertainment

& Lucky Monkey

Pictures present

in association with

The Exchange

Production

financing provided

by Grand Peaks

©The Last 5 Years the

Motion Picture LLC

Production

Companies

Sh-K-Boom

Entertainment

& Lucky Monkey

Pictures present

in association with

The Exchange

Production

financing provided

by Grand Peaks

Film Fund II, LLC

Filmed with the

generous support

of the New York

State Governor's

Office for Motion

Picture & Television

Development and the

New York City Mayor's

Office of Film, Theater

and Broadcasting

Executive Producers

Laura Ivey

Alan Simpson

Brian O'Shea

Donald Simpson

Robert Immerman

RSD Immerman

Paul Silver

Sherie Rene Scott

Ruth Mutch

Craig Balsam

Jen Namoff

Geoffrey Soffer

Cast

Anna Kendrick

Cathy Hiatt

Jeremy Jordan

Jamie Wellerstein

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Icon Film Distribution

New York, 2014. Finding a goodbye letter from her successful writer husband Jamie, struggling actress Cathy is devastated. Her memories of key scenes from their marriage unfold backwards from here, alternating with Jamie's, which unfold forwards from their early happiness. All scenes are sung-through musical monologues.

Jamie falls for 'Shiksa Goddess' Cathy, and is thrilled when he sells his first novel unexpectedly to Random House. Cathy is enraged at Jamie for neglecting her appearance in summer-stock theatre, and feels superfluous at his book launches. Jamie tries to enliven a defeated Cathy with a 'shtetl' tale he's written for her. Cathy shares a funny stint in Ohio summer theatre

with Jamie via Skype. Jamie proposes in Central Park, singing 'The Next Ten Minutes'. Cathy accepts Jamie's proposal. Jamie is tempted by the come-ons of other women. Cathy suffers through a terrible audition. Jamie pleads with her to support him – he believes in her. Cathy drives upstate with Jamie, telling him stories of her Brooklyn life before she met him, concluding 'I Can Do Better Than That'. Jamie cheats on the absent Cathy with a succession of women but 'Nobody Needs to Know'. Cathy and new love Jamie cannot bear to say goodbye to each other. Jamie is preparing to leave. Younger Cathy appears on the steps, and she and Jamie sing contrasting goodbyes. Then the older Cathy appears and lets herself into the apartment, coming full circle.

A Little Chaos

United Kingdom/USA 2014
Director: Alan Rickman

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

If you're looking for an example of autocratic patriarchy at its most extravagant, the court of Louis XIV would do just fine. Alan Rickman's second feature as director introduces into the Sun King's realm the widow Sabine de Barra – garden designer by trade, low born and, yes, a woman – gearing us up for a costume drama encapsulating sundry class and gender conflicts.

Entrusted to bring unparalleled splendour to the grounds of Versailles, the king's chief landscape artist, Maître Le Nôtre, assigns Sabine the task of creating a verdant arena for outdoor entertainments, even though her guiding conceit – that rigorous design and a natural wildness bring out the best in each other – stands as a radical statement within the geometrical formality in the ascendancy at the time. A not unarresting premise then, shaped by inserting the fictional Sabine into the midst of authentic history. But the script thenceforth rather struggles to create an incisive narrative from it, at least in part because the fascinating character of Louis XIV and the jolly flouncery and internecine rivalries of his lavish court provide rather too much distraction along the way.

Given that she's a single woman pitched against the whole apparatus of tradition, Sabine's underdog status should be the key to engaging the viewer, yet Kate Winslet's typically forthright performance – head held high, chin thrust forward – exudes such indomitability, resilience and ingenuity that the course of the storyline is barely ever in doubt. We share her conviction that a dab of chaos is just what Versailles needs; we sense she'll make a better match for Matthias Schoenaerts's brooding, careworn Le Nôtre than his scheming spouse (poor Helen McCrory, on a hiding to nothing); and Rickman's Louis is sufficiently taken with her to overlook the fact that on the first occasion they meet she mistakes him for a humble horticulturalist. In response, the



Venus in fleur: Kate Winslet

filmmakers even try to give the widowed Sabine vulnerability implants, furnishing her with a past that weighs on her in doomy, teasingly vague flashbacks – until the magic of screenwriting reveals and then resolves her travails at the most dramatically convenient juncture.

If the result ultimately lacks the sort of tautly sprung storytelling that would justify its going-on two-hour running time, Rickman the director (as with his likeable first feature *The Winter Guest* back in 1997) is happily generous towards his performers. With the rip-roaring camp of Stanley Tucci's sexually ambiguous Duc d'Orléans, Jennifer Ehle's bittersweet turn as a royal favourite now in eclipse, and even the actor-director's own contribution as Louis, flitting from whimsy to melancholy, we're never too far from an engaging inflection or bit of business. However, Rickman fails to persuade us that a few odd corners of English stately homes can transport us to the playground of the Sun King, offers little convincing spectacle and doesn't in the end seem that interested in gardening per se. But if his film rarely compels, it compensates with fleeting moments of charm. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gail Egan
Andrea Calderwood
Jeremy Brock
Screenplay
Alison Deegan
Alan Rickman
Jeremy Brock
Director of Photography
Ellen Kuras
Editor
Nicolas Gaster
Production Designer
James Merfield
Music Composed by
Peter Gregson
Production Sound Mixer
Gareth John
Costume Designer
Joan Bergin

©British
Broadcasting
Corporation, Little
Chaos Limited
Production Companies
Lionsgate UK &
BBC Films present
in association with
LipSync Productions
a Potboiler/The

Bureau production
Developed in
association with Kia
Jam Productions
Developed with the
support of the Media
Programme of the
European Union
Executive Producers
Zygi Kamasa
Guy Avshalom
Nick Manzi
Christine Langan
Ray Cooper
Richard Wolfe
Norman Merry

Cast
Kate Winslet
Sabine de Barra
Matthias
Schoenaerts
Maître André Le Nôtre
Alan Rickman
King Louis XIV
Stanley Tucci
Philippe, Duc
d'Orléans
Helen McCrory
Madame Le Nôtre
Steven Waddington
Thierry Duras
Jennifer Ehle

Madame de
Montespan

**Dolby Digital
In Colour**
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

France, 1682. Louis XIV decides to create a garden of unparalleled excellence at the palace of Versailles; the project is to be supervised by the king's chief landscape artist, Maître Le Nôtre. Looking to divide responsibilities for this vast undertaking, Le Nôtre interviews various garden designers, including the relatively untried Sabine de Barra. He's soon intrigued by her radical notion of contrasting order with the wildness of nature, and assigns her the task of creating an amphitheatre for royal entertainments. As she overcomes sceptical colleagues and recalcitrant labourers, Le Nôtre becomes drawn to her, much to the dismay of his wife, whose aristocratic connections have provided a foundation for his career. Sabine has a chance encounter with a man she takes to be a fellow gardener, but who is in fact the king; during their conversation, Sabine impresses him with her acute observations. Sabine's work-in-progress is almost destroyed by a flood caused by sabotage, and she almost drowns trying to close an open lock gate; she is rescued by Le Nôtre, who subsequently discovers that his wife was responsible. Although the king visits the water-damaged site and is unconvinced, Sabine wins him over again when she is officially presented at court. She and Le Nôtre make love, their relationship exorcising the trauma of the accidental deaths of her husband and daughter. Inaugurated with a lavish court masque, her design meets with acclaim.

in everyday settings, the film rides a fine, wavering line between realism and artifice. DP Steven Meizler's camerawork sticks to Jamie and Cathy like white on rice for the key emotional exchanges. But it glides the story through bike rides, car excursions and a Central Park proposal to open up what's basically a couple taking turns to sing at one another.

Despite its stage origins, *The Last 5 Years* nods at a diverse spread of movies: there's a distinct whiff of *Scenes from a Marriage* (1973) in its monologue form; *Two for the Road* (1967) in its rows; and the playful talkiness of Parisian musical drama *Les Chansons d'amour* (2007) in its songs. The big sticking point, though, is the film's novelty narrative, a non-linear, dual-POV story that's plaited like a loaf but plays in opposite time directions. So we get Cathy's climb back through sadness to newly minted love, set against Jamie's fall from bouncy optimism to self-centred cheating. Served without date-bearing title cards, the story's twists and jumps elicited mutters from the preview audience. In truth, it's only a doubled-up version of the back-to-front storytelling of *Merrily We Roll Along* or *Betrayal*, but without prior warning it's faintly disconcerting, till you get your eye in.

Musically, Brown's pleasing score is very much in harness to the story. His clever conversational lyrics are notably spikier ("I left Columbia and don't regret it/I wrote a book and Sonny Mehta read it!") than the largely unmemorable Sondheim-inflected show tunes. The most successful songs have a sophisticated feel for self-deception – Jamie protesting loyalty to the pissed-off Cathy in 'If I Didn't Believe in You' is a nimble feat of cruelty disguised as kindness. By contrast, there's a growing drama deficit in the couple's solipsistic alternate takes on their relationship. Their claustrophobia and the exclusively emotional action become a tad repetitive with only one singer at a time, no duets or group numbers, and other cast members forever slipping silently past the camera.

Thankfully the leads are gratifyingly good, drawing out the overarching themes of love, resentment and ambition in every exchange. Unlike the stage show, they're present for most of each other's songs (once, amusingly, via Skype), their reactions giving new resonance to the lyrics. Both take full advantage of the live-on-set filming (the new orthodoxy, since *Les Misérables*) to give fluid expressiveness to their songs but in contrasting styles. Jordan's broad-strokes, upbeat Broadway delivery suits Jamie's brashness and optimism. But Kendrick's ability (honed in *Pitch Perfect* and *Into the Woods*) to sing and act simultaneously with understated naturalism carries the day. Any film that starts with its heroine singing the wistful ballad 'Still Hurting' alone in a shadowy room, rather than a brassy opening number, has complete confidence in its star. And she earns it. Our sympathies start and stay with her Cathy, a valiant trier dumped by a self-involved jerk. So poignant is her portrayal that she skews what should be an evenly weighted account of marriage breakdown in her favour. The film's dramatic balance, if not its emotional heft, pays the price of her success. **S**

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence

Sweden/Germany/France/Norway 2014

Director: Roy Andersson

Certificate 12A 100m 2s

See Feature
on page 32

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Roy Andersson is a single-panel absurdist who subverts the traditional set-up and knockdown gag structure, landing his punchlines like rimshots played on a busted cymbal. He has been compared to Tati and Fellini, though it seems to me that he has as much in common with Gary Larson or Charles Addams. Billed by an opening title card as the “final part of a trilogy about being a human being”, Andersson’s *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* joins *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) and *You, the Living* (2007) to complete the writer-director’s magnum opus. Given the time that Andersson takes between projects, and the fact that he is now over 70, it may also represent his last testament, and suffice it to say he hasn’t broken character.

The title’s ‘pigeon’ is an actual or implied presence at the opening and closing of the film. In the first shot, it’s seen as a taxidermied specimen in a museum display case; in the closing, it is represented by an offscreen coo that captures the attention of some taxidermied-looking Swedes waiting at a bus stop on a Wednesday morning. Andersson prefers to shoot from a perspective as fixed as that of the bird in the ornithology display – I counted one camera move in *Pigeon*, this a very slight pan to the right – while the way he stages scenes gives them the aspect of a vitrine or diorama, as opposed to the surveillance camera-perspective developed by Ruben Ostlund, another native of Gothenburg. Andersson’s subjects don’t move much more than his frame does; they often stand almost stock-still, alienated from their environments and interfacing with them almost not at all, as though they’ve been green-screened into place.

A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence takes place in Gothenburg in what appears, for the most part, to be a contemporary setting, though the presence of cell phones is one of the few elements that anchor the movie in the now. Everyone seen with a phone seems to be having the same conversation – “I’m happy to hear you’re doing fine” – and the populace is for the most part ethnically uniform, the whitest white people in cinema, wearing the corpse-paint pallor familiar from Andersson’s work.

Without fanfare, the film periodically leaps from the present to distant points on the timeline. The clientele at a bar discuss an ancient regular who’s been visiting for more than 60 years, and then a title card and a change of paint job announce the shift of the scene to 1943 – the year of Andersson’s birth – where we encounter someone who may or may not be that regular in younger days, silent witness to a boisterous singalong staged as a musical number. The same melody is heard later in the film: in another bar, this one in the suburbs, business as usual is interrupted by a visit from Charles XII (1682-1718), and through the picture window his seemingly endless divisions can be seen marching past to the front. Later, the bedraggled remains of the force are seen heading in the other direction, retreating from the decisive and crushing defeat of the Battle of Poltava in 1709, accompanied by the wailing of widows.

Such tenuous connections – a phrase or a



Swede dreams: *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*

tune that recurs in wildly different situations, like a fugue – are the threads that knit together Andersson’s quiltwork of blackout scenes, along with a loose community of recurring characters: a military man who keeps missing dates and a lecture on orderly withdrawal; a zaftig flamenco instructor and a male pupil for whom she burns with unrequited lust; and – the nearest thing the film has to protagonists – a duo of middle-aged novelty salesmen who schlep their wares around town. Their goods include plastic vampire fangs and a rubber mask more given to eliciting screams than laughter. Continually stiffed on payments by shop owners, the salesmen sleep in a drab men’s shelter where they themselves are hounded for outstanding debts. In one scene they pay a visit to a debtor who shoos them away, begging poverty. This is followed by a scene at a children’s recital, where a sullen, husky girl

stumbles through a poem in which a pigeon reflects on “the fact that it had no money”.

Andersson’s version of “being a human being”, then, has a great deal to do with empty pockets, unpayable debts, with retreats and defeats – and this is in the best of cases. A section introduced with the title ‘homo sapiens’ begins in a test laboratory, where a woman in a lab coat prattles on her phone – “I’m happy to hear you’re doing fine” – while, in the foreground a chimp writhes under the administration of electric shocks. Following on from this is a scene in which pith-helmeted colonials drive chained Africans into a monumental torture device; it turns their agonised cries into a haunted music, to be enjoyed by an elderly crowd dressed as though for the opera. Here we may understand the novelty salesmen to be Andersson’s alter egos, peddling a comedy that is very close to horror. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Pernilla Sandström
Written by
Roy Andersson
Director of Photography
István Borbás
Gergely Pálos
Editor
Alexandra Strauss
Art Direction
Ulf Jonsson
Julia Tegström
Nicklas Nilsson
Sandra Parment
Isabel Sjöstrand
Sound Mixing
Robert Hefter
Owe Svensson
Costumes
Julia Tegström

©Roy Andersson
Filmproduktion AB, Essential Filmproduktion, Parisienne de Production, 4 ½ Fiksjon AS, ZDF/Arte, Arte France Cinéma, Sveriges Television AB
Production Companies
Studio 24 presents
Produced by
Roy Andersson

Filmproduktion AB
In co-production with 4 ½ Fiksjon AS, Essential Filmproduktion, Parisienne de Production, Sveriges Television AB, Arte France Cinéma, ZDF/Arte
With the support of Svenska Filminstitutet, Eurimages Council of Europe, Nordisk Film- och TV-fond, Norska Filmfonden, Film- und Medienstiftung NRW, Centre national du cinéma et de l’image animée

Cast
Nils Westblom
Sam
Holger Andersson
Jonathan
Per Bergqvist
Solveig Andersson
couple at museum
Sture Olsson
man with wine
Ingvar Olsson
old son
Ola Stensson

captain/barber
Lotti Törnros
dance teacher
Oscar Salomonsson
dancer
Linda Birgersson
cleaner
Jonas Gerholm
lonely officer
Arne Hellqvist
old patron
Gunnar Bergström
patron
Maia-Li Kaar
bartender
Charlotta Larsson
waitress
Anette Eklund
Johan Sköld
couple in kitchen
Viktor Gyllenberg
Charles XII

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Swedish
theatrical title
En duva satt på en
gren och funderade
på tillvaron

Gothenburg, Sweden, the present, 1943 and 1709. Three quotidian death scenes open a series of vignettes. One of these scenes takes place in a living room, one in a hospital bed, one on a ferryboat. In a dance studio, a flamenco instructor mauls one of her pupils. The man previously seen as captain of the ferryboat introduces himself in his new job as a barber. Two novelty salesmen meet in a bar and quarrel. The same bar is shown as it was in 1943, scene of a lively singalong. The novelty salesmen go on their rounds, pitching their goods and trying unsuccessfully to collect on overdue debts. As they stop to ask for directions in a suburban bar, Charles XII (1682-1718) and his army march past, on their way to war with the Russians. The novelty salesmen, living at a men’s shelter, are confronted by their own higher-ups, looking for overdue payments. At the suburban bar, a wounded Charles XII reappears, his vanquished army limping home. The novelty salesmen acrimoniously part company, then reconcile back at the men’s shelter. In a laboratory, a monkey is treated with electric shocks. A group of European colonials drive African slaves into an instrument that converts their tortured screams into eerie music, for the entertainment of an elderly crowd dressed as though for the opera. This appears to be the dream of one of the novelty salesmen, who awakens and relays his troubled conscience to his partner. On a Wednesday morning, a small group on their way to work wait at a bus stop, where a pigeon coos.

Run All Night

USA 2015

Director: Jaume Collet-Serra

Certificate 15 114m 11s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Run All Night, bookended by scenes in a boxing gym, is a fine piece of stick-and-move filmmaking, trained down to the last pound, combining solid fundamentals with a healthy measure of brio. It's another Liam Neeson actioner in which beleaguered patriarch Neeson has to save an imperilled family member, though the similarities are less important than the crucial difference – this isn't Olivier Megaton directing but Jaume Collet-Serra, one of the most reliable directors working today at what Andrew Sarris termed the 'Expressive Esoterica' level.

Run All Night is Neeson and Collet-Serra's third pairing, after *Unknown* (2011) and *Non-Stop* (2014) – all films that make use not just of Neeson's mighty-oak physique but also of his awkwardness and mournful gravity. Neeson begins this latest collaboration as a worthless, humped-over lush; roped into a humiliating stint playing Santa Claus at a Christmas party for his old boss, he even fouls that up. Once a prolific hitman, Jimmy Conlon has outlived his taste for killing and thus his usefulness, and now soaks up Jameson's in the pub that serves as base of operations for Shawn Maguire (Ed Harris), Jimmy's employer-turned-benefactor – they came up together in Hell's Kitchen, went into the service together and then did a lot of crime together. One night Shawn's son Danny (Boyd Holbrook) tries to kill Jimmy's estranged son Mike (Joel Kinnaman), and Jimmy kills Shawn's boy instead, launching a blood feud that will be played out in the space of a single night. The muscle memory in Jimmy's trigger finger snaps back into place, and away we go.

I'm sticking to the point, which is what Collet-Serra does. At times it seems as if his MO is to see how much he can cut down each shot, to the very last frame, while still maintaining legibility, even in the film's repeated helicopter aerial city views, here resuscitated from cliché by the jagged abbreviation. The effect of this is a lucid yet propulsive movie, an early high point being a car chase that passes along the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, through oncoming traffic on Jamaica Avenue and right into a storefront, always kept wobbling on the precipice of total chaos. In scenes like this, Collet-Serra manages to suggest canonical American action directors of the 70s such as William Friedkin and Walter Hill while never slipping into fealty – I mention Hill because I don't think you can stage a punch-up in a subway restroom without thinking about *The Warriors* (1979), though JCS introduces the particular innovation of strangulation by hand-towel.

In other set pieces, eye-catching visual anchors – flaming torches or laser sights – are used as points of reference with which to diagram the action. Both of the scenes mentioned involve Mr Price (Common), a hired killer who wastes cops with impunity in a film that, before his appearance, has maintained a fairly conservative body count. Just as Collet-Serra pushes the limits of coherency, he also tests how far he can push his film from its established realist trappings without knocking the entire edifice down into a mire of preposterousness. Here the concrete emotional foundations he sets down for his material go some way. For as long as he's been able to command the



Night flight: Liam Neeson, Joel Kinnaman

budgets to do so, he has populated his casts with reputable actors and, rather than being content to collect the capital of their prestige, elicits performances of unusual conviction from them; treating genre material in deadly earnest, he expects the same of others. Vera Farmiga and Peter Sarsgaard were the victims of the unblinkingly cruel *Orphan* (2009); *Unknown* benefited from a wary reunion between old pros Bruno Ganz and Frank Langella; here, it's Harris and Neeson, both as good here as they've ever been in the serious movies that pseuds wish they'd get back to. We also get an alarming appearance by Nick Nolte as Jimmy's unkempt brother, who lives at home with mom, sporting a Hemingway beard, ponytail and mouthful of broken teeth and wearing a tatty old cardigan open to expose a bare, pink chest – if you have ever lived in the dregs of vinyl-siding Irish New York, the character may be immediately recognisable.

Run All Night takes place for the most part

in a composite Brooklyn-Queens where every residence looks out on an industrial zone or an elevated train line, traversed by swooping camera moves that transition between scenes. Minor liberties are taken with city geography and the timeline, though Collet-Serra is mindful of maintaining certain unities: the action takes place over one rainy December night, while the background detail of a hockey game at Madison Square Garden later becomes a plot point. NYC is not, as the film would have you believe, plagued by winter thunderstorms, but the film is otherwise scrupulous in detail work – Jimmy giving a primer in opening a locked car with a shoelace, or using his intimate knowledge of every corner of his local pub to smoke out Shawn's goons. Such moments are precious: the talking point today will be about how *Run All Night* is one of many Neeson action movies, but what will be remembered years later is that it's one of the best. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Roy Lee
Brooklyn Weaver
Michael Tadross

Written by

Brad Ingelsby

Director of Photography

Martin Ruhe

Edited by

Dirk Westervelt

Production Designer

Sharon Seymour

Music by/

Score Recorded,

Programmed and Mixed by

Tom Holkenborg (Junkie XL)

Production

Sound Mixer

Michael Barosky

Costumes

Designed by

Catherine Marie

Stunt Co-ordinators

Doug Coleman

Mark Vanselow

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Entertainment Inc.

and Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment, LLC

Production Companies

A Warner Bros.

Pictures presentation

In association

with Ratpac-Dune

Entertainment

A Vertigo

Entertainment

production

A Jaume Collet-

Serra film

With the participation

of the Canadian Film

or Video Production

Services Tax Credit

Executive Producers

Steven Mnuchin

Jaume Collet-Serra

John Powers

Middleton

Cast

Liam Neeson

Jimmy Conlon,

'The Gravedigger'

Joel Kinnaman

Mike Conlon

Vincent D'Onofrio

Detective John

Harding

Nick Nolte

Eddie Conlon,

Jimmy's brother

Bruce McGill

Pat Mullen

Genesis Rodriguez

Gabriela Conlon,

Jimmy's wife

Common

Andrew Price

Ed Harris

Shawn Maguire

Boyd Holbrook

Danny Maguire

Holt McCallany

Frank

Aubrey Omari

Joseph

Curtis 'Legs' Banks

Dolby Digital

In Colour

Prints by

Fotokem

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

New York City, present day. Jimmy Conlon is a burnt-out former hitman for Shawn Maguire, an Irish mobster who now runs a legitimate business. Conlon spends his days drinking, and is estranged from his son Mike. Shawn's son Danny becomes embroiled with Albanian gangsters, and Mike, working as a chauffeur, sees him murdering his erstwhile partners. Danny arrives at Mike's house, intending to eliminate any witnesses to his crime. Instead, Jimmy kills Danny, and so Shawn puts a price on the heads of both father and son. Against Jimmy's advice, Mike turns himself in to the police, who are ready to deliver him up for execution but Jimmy intervenes again. After a high-speed car chase in which two police officers are killed, Jimmy and Mike escape. Mike sends his family into hiding at a lakeside cabin. Jimmy meets with Shawn to plead for Mike's life, then flees Shawn's henchmen. Reunited, Jimmy and Mike search for Legs, a young man Mike trains at a boxing gym who has evidence to clear Mike's name. Arriving at the housing projects where Legs lives, they narrowly escape both the police and Mr Price, a professional killer hired by Shawn. While Mike goes to his family, Jimmy confronts Shawn and his remaining henchmen at Shawn's pub headquarters, slaughtering them all. He heads to the cabin to give Mike the news that his name has been cleared, arriving in time to intercept and kill Mr Price, losing his own life in the process.

The Salvation

Denmark/United Kingdom/South Africa/Sweden 2014
 Director: Kristian Levring
 Certificate 15 92m 19s

Reviewed by Edward Buscombe

Director Kristian Levring was one of the signatories of the Dogme 95 manifesto, intended to purge cinema of artifice. Among its provisions were that murder and weapons were prohibited, that the action should be set in the present time, and that genre movies were not acceptable. This would appear to rule out any possibility of a Dogme western, and certainly Levring's *The Salvation* is not it. It is in fact an almost wholly traditional example of the genre, drawing on several well-worked storylines and characters. It calls to mind *High Noon* with its plot about a small town in terror of the gunmen who hold sway, while its revenge theme is a mainstay of countless westerns. There's even a reference to the genre's archetypal captivity narrative in the character of the Princess, who has been rescued from Indians but only after her tongue has been cut out (no *Dances with Wolves* sentimentality here).

It's surprising to find a contemporary film that sticks so closely to the classic form of the genre. For the past 30 or 40 years almost every new western (not that there have been many) has been labelled 'revisionist', meaning that it seeks to interrogate and even subvert the genre. We have had feminist and ecological westerns, 'setting the historical record straight' westerns, several attempts at redressing the genre's earlier bias against Native Americans and Mexicans, and even modernist westerns (*Meek's Cutoff*). The fact that Delarue, the man who has the town in his evil grip here, is buying up settlers' land in anticipation of a coming oil boom might suggest a link to contemporary concerns about fossil fuels, but in fact singing cowboy Gene Autry was working that theme in the 1930s.

It's to the credit of the largely European team both behind and in front of the camera (mainly Scandinavians, with a smattering of British and French) that the film has such an authentic feel. The narrative is tightly constructed, the



Eva Green, Mads Mikkelsen, Jeffrey Dean Morgan

characterisations plausible and uncomplicated (there's nothing of the so-called psychological western here), and the scruffy little town where the action takes place looks exactly as we would expect. One touch is perhaps more Sergio Leone than John Ford: the hero, working his way methodically through Delarue's accomplices, discovers the mayor, doubling as town undertaker, constructing a coffin for his dead brother Peter. The coffin, with the dead mayor inside, is duly delivered to Delarue aboard a driverless wagon.

DP Jens Schlosser has brilliantly captured the harsh glaring light of the south-western US and made the most of the arid landscape. The acting too is uniformly forceful. Eva Green smoulders intensely in a completely mute role as the tongueless Princess, while Mads Mikkelsen, better known for his title role in the TV horror series *Hannibal*, is a convincing if initially reluctant hero, literally the last man standing. He's well backed up by Jeffrey Dean Morgan as the truly frightening Delarue. Threatening to execute two townspeople for every day that his brother's killer is not delivered up to him, he is as good as his word; and when offered the town cripple and a very old woman, he claims this is short measure and kills an extra man as well. Ⓜ

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Sisse Graum
 Jørgensen
 Anders Thomas
 Jensen

Director of Photography

Jens Schlosser

Editor

Pernille Bech
 Christensen

Production Designer

Jørgen Munk
 Composer
 Kasper Winding

Sound Designer

Al Sirkett

Costume Designer

Diana Cilliers

@Zentropa

Entertainments33

ApS, Black Creek

Films Limited and

Spier Productions

(PTY), Limited

Production Companies

Zentropa

Entertainments33

presents in

co-production with

Forward Films,

Spier Films

with support from

Danish Film Institute,

DR, Nordisk Film &

TV Fond, Film i Väst

a film by Kristian

Levring

Produced by Zentropa

Entertainments33

in co-production

with Forward Films,

Spier Films

with support from

Danish Film Institute,

DR, Nordisk Film

& TV Fond

Developed with

the support from

Film i Väst

with the support

of the MEDIA

Programme of the

European Union

Produced with the

assistance of the

Department of

Trade and Industry

South Africa

Executive Producers

Peter Aalbæk Jensen

Peter Garde

Cast

Mads Mikkelsen

Jon

Eva Green

Madelaine, 'Princess'

Eric Cantona

Corsican

Mikael Persbrandt

Peter

Douglas Henshall

Mallick

Michael

Raymond-James

Paul

Jeffrey Dean Morgan

Delarue

Jonathan Pryce

Keane

Nanna Øland

Fabricious

Marie

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

US, 1871. Two Danish brothers, Jon and Peter, homesteading outside the meagre town of Black Creek, wait at the train station for the arrival of Jon's wife and son from Denmark. On the stagecoach to their farm, two drunken men assault Jon before raping and murdering his wife and cutting his son's throat. Jon kills both men in revenge, then learns that one of them was the brother of Delarue, who has terrorised the local townspeople into craven submission. The town mayor is in league with Delarue to cheat the settlers out of their land, which sits on top of a lucrative oilfield. The sheriff does nothing when Delarue begins to execute two townspeople for

every day that his brother's killer is not delivered to him. The widow of Delarue's dead brother, known as the Princess, is a mute whose tongue was cut out while in Indian captivity. With his brother dead, Delarue takes the opportunity to rape her. In revenge she tries to escape with all his money but is recaptured. Delarue intends to murder her once all his gang have raped her too. Jon is eventually taken prisoner but is rescued by Peter. The two are separated and Peter is killed. Jon meticulously works his way through the whole gang, finally killing Delarue with the help of the Princess. The two survivors, spurning the overtures of a grateful citizenry, ride west together.

Samba

Directors: Eric Toledano, Olivier Nakache

Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

How do you follow on from making the second most popular French film of all time? That was the task facing Olivier Nakache and Eric Toledano, directors of 2011's *Intouchables*, starring Omar Sy as a black carer who bonds with a quadriplegic white aristocrat. The smash hit turned Sy from domestic television comic to bankable lead and LA resident rubbing shoulders with Hollywood stars. Here he plays the eponymous Samba, an illegal immigrant from Senegal who falls foul of the police and ends up in a detention centre; there he meets Alice (Charlotte Gainsbourg), a well-meaning but fairly hopeless volunteer on a sabbatical from her highly stressed executive job after suffering from burnout.

Samba the film is equally well-meaning, and accurate, in its portrayal of the exploited lives of illegal immigrants (evoking Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things*), both harassed and tolerated by police as they underpin western European economies – working for peanuts in lowly jobs in restaurant kitchens, refuse-sorting centres and on building sites. In this respect the opening scene, which contrasts a wedding party in a luxury Paris hotel with the quiet aftermath in the kitchen where Samba is working a shift, is excellent, demonstrating without hyperbole the inequalities and precariousness of the immigrants' lives. Here one can see the input of the 2011 book that inspired the film, *Samba pour la France* by Delphine Coulin (who co-scripted the film), based on her work in a centre run by volunteers similar to that depicted on screen.

Trouble begins with the addition of the protracted love story between Samba and Alice, which entails an uneasy combination of topical social issue, melodrama and romcom. Particularly egregious is a comic scene parodying a Diet Coke window-washing advert in which Tahar Rahim, who plays Samba's friend Wilson, strips to his waist and cavorts in front of female office workers. While it is nice to see Rahim playing against type in a comic role, the moment is clunky and unworthy of him.

As in *Intouchables*, the pairing of underprivileged-but-vigorous black with privileged-but-etiolated white (Gainsbourg at her most annoyingly wan) works to revitalise the latter in a fairytale resolution – though it's one that disposes of the 'bad' black



Omar Sy, Charlotte Gainsbourg

The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel

USA/United Kingdom/United Arab Emirates 2015

Director: John Madden

Certificate PG 122m 28s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

This effort to replicate a film that made an unexpected success of foregrounding characters in their later years depicts the effort to replicate a hotel that has made an unexpected success of catering to guests in their later years. In both cases, the enterprise faces challenges. The film wears on its sleeve the responsibility of building on an existing phenomenon, offering critics an easy line that many of them have hungrily accepted by including the words 'Second Best' in its title. Its characters, meanwhile, are lightly obstructed by troubles of a sitcommy sort – indeed, the main narrative line is rather blatantly lifted from an episode of *Fawlty Towers*, a reference that will surely jump out at much of the target audience.

Such shamelessness is typical of a film that's breezily aware of what it can get away with. Improbable interactions are rife, and simple explanations are inexplicably avoided: in a convoluted early subplot, Norman (Ronald Pickup) attempts to save his girlfriend from a hit he thinks he may have taken out on her by mistake; people launch into highly personal conversations in public, as when Jean (Penelope Wilton) bluntly demands a divorce from Douglas (Bill Nighy) in the company of their daughter and his girlfriend; and Douglas's endearing ineptitude as a tour guide extends to not knowing what century the ruins he's describing date from. This stuff is clumsy as soon as you think about it, and yet in the warm glow of the film's pleasantly ramshackle settings and skilled ensemble of performers, it really doesn't matter that much.

What stands out instead is an emphasis on seizing the day, cut with just enough astringency to avoid outright mawkishness ("That's the great



Bed and bored: Lillete Dubey, Richard Gere

and terrible thing about life," spits Douglas, "there's just so much bloody *potential*!") and a script that find agreeably unpredictable deviations from the obvious narrative path. Mature sexuality is foregrounded without condescension or forced friskiness; and the complex expressiveness of the heavily lined faces on screen really does expose the ludicrousness of maturing actors attempting to freeze their way back to youth.

This is not a well-oiled machine – the multiplicity of plotlines means that no relationship gets more than glancing attention, while the audience is liable to feel as relieved as Dev Patel looks when he's finally permitted to drop hotel manager Sonny's laboured gawkiness and break into a dance of out-of-character but delightful virtuosity. But not unlike Judi Dench's Evelyn – who, relieved of the narrator duties she bore in the first *Marigold* film, floats through this one like the embodiment of beautifully self-sufficient old age – it's neat, well intentioned and pleased with itself in a rather nice way. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Nicolas Duval Adassovsky Yann Zenou Laurent Zeitoun	Production Companies A Quad, Ten Films, Gaumont, TF1 Films Productions, Korokoro co-production With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+ and TF1 Developed with the aid of Cinéma 8 Développement and Indefilms Initiative Supported by la Procirep and ANGOA	Issaka Sawadogo Jonas Hélène Vincent Marcelle Christiane Millet Madeleine Clotilde Mollet Josiane Liya Kebede Gracieuse
Screenplay/ Dialogue Eric Toledano Olivier Nakache With the collaboration of Delphine Coulin, Muriel Coulin Based on the novel <i>Samba</i> pour la France by Delphine Coulin	Director of Photography Stéphane Fontaine	In Colour [1.85:1] Subtitles
Editor Dorian Rigal-Anous	Cast Omar Sy Samba Charlotte Gainsbourg Alice Tahar Rahim Wilson Izïa Higelin Manu Youngar Fall Lamouna	Distributor Koch Media
Art Direction Nicolas de Boisueille		
Music Ludovico Einaudi		
Sound Recordist Pascal Armant		
Costume Designer Isabelle Pannetier		

France, present day. Samba is a Senegalese immigrant who has worked in Paris for ten years and is about to get a catering qualification, though he is still without official papers. After a random police check-up, he is sent to a detention centre, where he meets volunteer Alice, a stressed executive recovering from burnout. Jonas, a fellow inmate, makes Samba promise to track down Gracieuse, the woman he hopes to marry when he comes out. Alice helps Samba get out of the detention centre, though his status is still illegal. Samba goes to live with his uncle. He finds Gracieuse and they have a one-night stand. He befriends Wilson, who is supposedly a Brazilian (though in fact he turns out to be north African), and takes on a number of precarious building and security jobs. Alice is attracted to Samba but their relationship remains platonic; by contrast her friend Manu has sex with Wilson. Samba acquires false papers and changes his name and appearance, growing a moustache, in order to work. Just as his relationship with Alice is finally consummated, Jonas reappears and attacks him for sleeping with Gracieuse. They fight in the street but are pursued by police and fall into the canal. Samba is presumed dead but survives, incognito, as he was wearing Jonas's jacket. Just as he is about to return to Senegal with his uncle, Alice finds Jonas's identity papers in his jacket and encourages Samba to stay in Paris. She successfully goes back to work and he finds employment as a chef.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Graham Broadbent Pete Czernin	Pictures production Made in association with TSG	Rajesh Tailang Babul
Screenplay Ol Parker	Entertainment Executive Producers Jeff Skoll Jonathan King John Madden Michael Dreyer	Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]
Screen Story Ol Parker		Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
Director of Photography Ben Smithard	Cast Judi Dench Evelyn Greenstade Maggie Smith Muriel Donnelly Bill Nighy Douglas Ainslie Dev Patel Sonny Kapoor Celia Imrie Madge Hardcastle Penelope Wilton Jean Ainslie Ronald Pickup Norman Cousins Tina Desai Sunaina Diana Hardcastle Carol Parr Lillete Dubey Mrs Kapoor Tamsin Greig Lavinia Beech Shazad Latif Kushal David Strathairn Ty Burley Richard Gere Guy Chambers	
Film Editor Victoria Boydell		
Production Designer Martin Childs		
Music Thomas Newman		
Production Sound Mixer Nakul Kamte		
Costume Designer Louise Stjernsward		
©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, PM/IN Finance, LLC and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC		
Production Companies Fox Searchlight Pictures presents in association with Participant Media and Image Nation Abu Dhabi a Blueprint		

San Diego, the present. With their Best Exotic Marigold Hotel permanently at capacity, co-managers Sonny and Muriel approach US investors with a view to opening a second hotel. The investors plan to send an incognito inspector to Jaipur to check out their existing operation.

Back in Jaipur, Sonny is so busy looking after Guy, the guest he takes to be the inspector, that he neglects preparations for his wedding to Sunaina. Another new resident, Lavinia, is also neglected. Sonny is upset when Sunaina's flirtatious friend Kushal buys the dilapidated hotel he has been eyeing for his expansion. Long-term Marigold guest Evelyn embraces a new job, and hesitates over her undefined relationship with fellow resident Douglas, whose estranged wife arrives unexpectedly to ask for a divorce. Meanwhile Madge and Norman, the owners of failing expat club the Viceroy, have romantic troubles of their own: Norman justly fears that his girlfriend Carol is cheating on him, and Madge is juggling two suitors. Guy falls for Sonny's widowed mother Mrs Kapoor, while Muriel establishes that it is in fact Lavinia who is inspecting the hotel. It transpires that Guy is too, and that he and Lavinia work for competing concerns. Guy decides to quit his job but recommends the hotel to his company for partnership. Sonny apologises to Sunaina and the wedding goes ahead. Douglas and Evelyn toast the couple; Guy and Mrs Kapoor dance together; Carol and Norman agree to try monogamy; and Madge chooses her modest driver Babul over both her boyfriends. Sonny reveals the location of his new hotel: the Viceroy. Muriel, who has been secretive about her state of health, slips away alone, leaving the newlyweds a letter of congratulation.

Stonehearth Asylum

USA 2014
Director: Brad Anderson
Certificate 15 112m 54s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

A humanistic reconfiguration of Edgar Allan Poe's satirical short story 'The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether', in which patients take over a hospital and overthrow the staff, *Stonehearth Asylum* often makes for uneven viewing. Set during the last days of 1899, it alternates between poignancy, action, madcap comedy and elaborate Victoriana set pieces (including two fancy-dress balls and a steampunk device that reanimates a dead frog), with dialogue that isn't really smart enough to bridge the gaps between these disparate elements or provide meaningful commentary on the issues raised.

What these various aspects ultimately serve – and what sets Brad Anderson's film in opposition to previous adaptations of Poe's story (Juan López Moctezuma's *The Mansion of Madness* and Jan Svankmajer's *Lunacy*) – is a positive message of progress. At the titular asylum, a New Year's Eve bonfire, assembled by the patients from a giant pile of restraints and medical files, signifies the end of treatments involving blasts of ice water, shackles or gyrating chairs, and signals that a new era of empathetic, effective approaches to mental illness is dawning. The less successful aspects of the patients' experiment (lack of heat, dwindling food supplies) are mentioned in passing, while scene after scene shows formerly hopeless cases transformed into happier, healthier individuals by being treated like human beings rather than problems to be shut away: a mute rape victim thrives as a nurse, a deformed giant ceases his violent outbursts after being addressed by his name instead of his freak-show title, and a trans woman is simply allowed to be herself. (Save for the two murderers in charge of the asylum, the film goes out of its way to make the secondary characters clearly not insane by today's standards, but merely victims of their



Stir crazy: Ben Kingsley

time and circumstance.) Even the two central figures – Kate Beckinsale's 'hysterical' Eliza (a noblewoman who's actually been sexually abused by her husband) and an escaped patient from a different institution pretending to be an apprenticing 'alienist' (Jim Sturgess) – flee to Italy at the end of the film, waltzing in some villa's courtyard, freed from the perpetually foggy, freezing, castle-like Stonehearth. The revolt has reformed the asylum for the better into a utopian vision, one that doesn't reflect that much of what the 20th century *actually* held for the 'insane'.

Still, it should be said that *Stonehearth Asylum* is noble for portraying mental illness as something other than tragic-romantic, a minor character trait or a paralysing condition. It's also not entirely unenjoyable to see some of Britain's most esteemed actors – Ben Kingsley, Michael Caine, Brendan Gleeson – chewing the scenery. For better or worse, *Stonehearth Asylum* doesn't seem as franchise-friendly as *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. **S**

The Town That Dreaded Sundown

USA 2014, Director: Alfonso Gomez-Rejon
Certificate 15 86m 7s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Charles B. Pierce's *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* (1976) is an early and oddly memorable entry in the based-on-a-true-story serial-killer genre. Less listless than Pierce's Bigfoot hit *The Legend of Boggy Creek* (1972), it's still a rather rambling, shapeless picture that stirs to life mostly in its more outrageous kill sequences – especially a scene in which the sack-hooded murderer tapes a knife to a trombone and wah-wah-waahs a victim to death. Whereas the likes of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) made spurious claims to a factual basis, Pierce's film dramatised a real series of murders committed by someone who was tagged the Phantom Killer. As with *Zodiac* (2007), whose mystery villain has a very similar MO, the unresolved nature of the case set challenges for the filmmaker – so a climax in which the killer is nearly caught was introduced to provide a sense of drama. The fact that the unknown culprit might still have been alive in 1976 was used as a selling point, with a poster tagline reading: "In 1946, this man killed five people... today, he still lurks the streets of Texarkana, Ark."

One aspect of the story accurately represented in this postmodern reimagining of Pierce's film is the love-hate relationship Texarkana has had with *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* – a source of income while it was being filmed but an unwelcome reminder of a violent past at the time of its original release, then rehabilitated and accepted as part of local history to the extent that annual screenings (such as the one depicted here) do actually take place.

Directed by Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, who has worked on the playful *American Horror Story* TV series, and scripted by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa, of the *Carrie* remake, this is so self-aware and self-referential that it might as well call itself *Scream 5*; indeed, the solution to the (fictional) mystery of copycat killings that ape the old movie rather than the actual crimes seems modelled very closely on the resolutions of three out of four *Scream* films, with a guessable culprit teamed up with someone more successfully beyond suspicion. Like the *Scream* films, this knows how far to take the cleverness before dropping it in favour of relentless, efficient and merciless horrors.

Where the old film is being referenced, this one works smartly – Gomez-Rejon is much better placed to handle the trombone-slide knifing than Pierce was, and intercutting the new horror with the old images unexpectedly pays off. Addison Timlin's Jami is a winsome, appealing heroine – Pierce's film had only marginalised female characters – and her relationships with her protective grandmother (veteran Veronica Cartwright, given a meaty role) and worshipful research assistant Nick (Travis Tope) have a sense of life that adds poignancy to the story.

Like a TV series, this gives its guest stars the room to show off a little – Anthony Anderson amusingly plays off Ben Johnson's 1976 performance as a preening Texas Ranger, Edward Herrmann is the hypocritical preacher who claims the killer is doing God's work by terrorising people back to church, and Denis O'Hare is splendidly twitchy and paranoid as Charles B. Pierce Jr (a real person,

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bruce Davey
Mel Gibson
Mark Amin
Screenplay
Joe Gangemi
Based on a story [*The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether*] by Edgar Allan Poe
Director of Photography
Thomas Yatsko
Edited by
Malcolm Jamieson
Brian Gates
Production Designer
Alain Baine
Music
John Debnay
Sound Design and Supervision
Lon Bender
Bill Dean
Costume Designer
Thomas Olah

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Production Companies
Millennium Films presents an Icon and Sobini Films production
A film by Brad

Anderson
This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program.
Executive Producers
Vicki Christianson
Cami Winikoff
David W. Higgins
Avi Lerner
Lati Grobman
Christa Campbell
Mark Gill
Rene Besson

Cast
Kate Beckinsale
Lady Eliza Graves
Jim Sturgess
Edward Newgate
David Thewlis
Mickey Finn
Brendan Gleeson
alienist
Ben Kingsley
Dr Silas Lamb
Michael Caine
Benjamin Salt
Sinead Cusack
Mrs Pike

Jason Flemyng
Swanwick
Sophie Kennedy Clark
Millie
Christopher Fulford
Paxton
Guillaume Delaunay
Timbs

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Oxford University, 1899. A professor brings Eliza Graves before his students as an example of hysteria. On Christmas Eve, Dr Edward Newgate travels to Stonehearth Asylum for an apprenticeship with the superintendent, Dr Lamb. Lamb shows Newgate around the asylum, where patients are allowed to do as they wish. After a faux pas at a dinner where patients and staff dine together, Eliza warns Newgate to be careful. He refuses to leave without her. That night, Newgate discovers the real staff locked in cages in the basement, and realises that the criminally insane patients have assumed control of the asylum. Newgate decides to go along with the pretence until he can find a way to release the staff. He grows close to Eliza, who helps with nursing duties. Lamb performs a rudimentary form of electroshock therapy on the real superintendent as revenge for the brutal treatments he used on patients; this erases the superintendent's memory. On New Year's Eve, Newgate attempts to spike the champagne but is caught and almost subjected to the same electroshock treatment. He shows Lamb a photograph of one of the young men he murdered, which puts Lamb into a catatonic state. Eliza frees Newgate, and discovers that he has a pocket watch with her picture in it. He explains that he saw her at the demonstration in Oxford.

Several months later: the asylum is run more humanely. It is revealed that the doctor who did the demonstration in Oxford was the real Dr Newgate. The man impersonating him is a delusional patient infatuated with Eliza, and has run away to Italy with her.

Unfinished Business

USA/Luxembourg/Germany 2015

Director: Ken Scott

Certificate 15 90m 49s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Tom Wilkinson displays a flawless American accent in between bong hits in *Unfinished Business*, and bully for him. When a good actor is trapped in a movie this bad, all he can do is hold up his end of the bargain and cash the cheque at the end of the shoot. Ken Scott's comedy about a trio of St Louis businessmen – played by Wilkinson, Vince Vaughn and Dave Franco – who descend on Germany to close a crucial deal only to be waylaid by circumstance and their own ineptitude is atrociously made and weirdly conservative despite liberal dollops of full-frontal nudity. Since there are no surprises in its triumph-of-the-pudgy-underdog plot, the only thing keeping viewers engaged is the underlying sense of ideological confusion.

Introduced in the middle of a Jerry Maguire-ish rant against his sleek female boss Chuck (Sienna Miller), Vaughn's Dan Trunkman is meant to be a sympathetic figure: the office drone who rebels against the queen. But his decision at the end of the film's first scene to quit a high-paying office job to strike out on his own plays as selfish and arrogant rather than inspiring. This could be an interesting subject for a comedy – the guy who allows himself to be seduced by his own Horatio Alger rhetoric – but Scott and screenwriter Steven Conrad aren't interested in that kind of complexity. Instead they give their hero a couple of wacky sidekicks (Wilkinson's middle-aged sad sack Tim and Dave Franco's addled juvenile Mike), transform Chuck into a black-widow antagonist who gleefully sleeps with one of Dan's prospective business partners to scuttle a deal, and deposit him in Berlin, where fish-out-of-water hijinks ensue.

Scott, who previously directed Vaughn in 2013's *Delivery Man*, is a filmmaker who goes out of his way to demonstrate a certain species of sweetness: the kind that's incongruously self-serving. Scenes in which Dan frets about his bullied and overweight teenage son (whom he wants to send to private school)



The daftman's contract: Vince Vaughn

or has an emotional heart-to-heart with a plump, unhappy gay colleague (Nick Frost) are there mostly to remind us of what a swell, sensitive guy he is, and maybe to plant the same suggestion about his director.

Meanwhile, the film's unwillingness to confront Mike's apparent mental retardation (which is at least delicately acted by Franco) while wringing laughs out of his various cock-ups is evasive at best and offensive at worst. It's also hard to know how to react to a scene in which Dan crashes a massive G8 protest en route to a big meeting. On the one hand, it's weird to see the iconography of political revolution being wielded so aggressively in an American studio comedy. On the other, the point of the scene is that the demonstrators are making Dan late, and that once safely ensconced inside, he's able to close a deal with a metal-industry titan who employs 200,000 people but recognises his new collaborator's humble, can-do spirit. The implication is that pretty soon, regular-guy Dan is going to be part of the 1 per cent. What a relief. **S**



Imitation game: Addison Timlin, Travis Tope

who acted in his father's films but not *The Town That Dreaded Sundown*, discovered in a beached boat stuffed full of movie memorabilia and conspiracy theories. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jason Blum
Ryan Murphy

Screenplay

Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa
Based on the 1976 film written by Earl E. Smith

Director of Photography

Michael Goi

Editor

Joe Leonard

Production Designer

Hannah Beachler

Music

Ludwig Goransson

Production Sound Mixer

Jim Emswiler

Costume Designer

Stephani Lewis

Corporation presents a

Blumhouse/Ryan

Executive Producers

Jeanette

Producers

Volturmo-Brill

Film Extracts

Jessica L. Hall

The Town That Dreaded Sundown

(1976)

Cast

Addison Timlin

Jami

Veronica

Cartwright

Lillian

Gary Cole

Chief Deputy Tillman

Edward Herrmann

Reverend Cartwright

Joshua Leonard

Deputy Foster

Denis O'Hare

Charles B. Pierce Jr

Anthony Anderson

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Production Companies

Orion Pictures

Lone Wolf Morales

Ed Lauter

Sheriff Underwood

Travis Tope

Nick

Spencer Treat Clark

Corey

Wes Chatham

Danny

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Arnon Milchan

Todd Black

Jason Blumenthal

Steve Tisch

Anthony Katagas

Written by

Steven Conrad

Director of

Photography

Oliver Stapleton

Edited by

Michael Tronick

Jon Poll

Peter Teschner

Production Designer

Luca Tranchino

Music

Alex Wurman

Supervising

Sound Editor

Mandell Winter

Costume Designer

David Robinson

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Inc. (in the US only)

©Monarchy

Enterprises S.à.r.l. (in

all other territories)

Production Companies

Regency Enterprises

presents an Escape

Artists/New Regency

production

Co-produced by

Studio Babelsberg

With support

of Deutscher

Filmförderfonds

Executive Producers

Steven Conrad

David Bloomfield

James Marsden

Jim Spinch

Britton Sear

Paul Trunkman

Ella Anderson

Bess Trunkman

Dolby Digital

In Colour

Prints by

FotoKem

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

St Louis, the present. Facing a pay cut, mineral-

industry salesman Dan Trunkman quits his job and starts his own business. He hires two employees – veteran Tim and young novice Mike – and uses a branch of Dunkin' Donuts as his operating base.

A year later, the trio are in line for a big deal, but Dan's former boss Chuck begins pursuing the same client. Dan and his team are obliged to fly to Berlin, which causes problems for Dan's family, especially his bullied teenage son. In Berlin, Dan and his team crash their car into a deer; when they finally arrive for the meeting, they discover that it's been pushed ahead a few days. Dan checks into a hotel that is in fact an art gallery, and is forced to become an exhibit; Tim stays with Mike in a hostel and laments his lost youth; Mike loses his virginity to a local girl. The three colleagues go to a gay fetish club, where Dan thanks to Bill, an employee of the corporation he's trying to work with. The next morning, Dan learns that he didn't win the contract. He copes by video-calling his son and then running the Berlin marathon in a business suit. He finds himself caught up in a G8 protest; luckily, the German businessman he's been seeking all along is hiding inside the surrounded building. They have a meeting and Dan closes the deal.

Texarkana, on the Texas-Arkansas border, present day. Teenagers Jami and Corey attend a drive-in screening of 'The Town That Dreaded Sundown', a 1976 film based on an unsolved series of murders that took place in Texarkana in the 1940s. Jami is disturbed by the violent film and Corey drives her out into the woods, where they are attacked by someone wearing a mask like the one worn by the killer. Corey is killed. Lone Wolf Morales, a Texas Ranger, takes command of the investigation. Further murders take place, mimicking scenes from the film. Jami and archive-keeper Nick investigate the original murders and the production of the film, visiting Charles Pierce Jr – son of the director – who has wild theories about the identity of the killer. Jami resolves to leave town and go to college but she is waylaid by the killers – Deputy Foster, grandson of a murder victim wrongly assumed to be the killer himself, and Corey, who has faked his death and resents Jami because she has a chance to escape the town. Foster and Corey are killed, and Jami goes to California.

White Shadow

Italy/Germany/USA/Tanzania/Bosnia and Herzegovina 2013

Director: Noaz Deshe

Certificate: not submitted 116m

Reviewed by Anna Smith

The true-life premise of *White Shadow* is so chilling that the film barely needs to elaborate. In Tanzania, albinos are being murdered for their body parts – witch doctors claim their limbs and organs will bring luck and success in business, and so huge bounties are paid to those who hunt them down and kill them. It's a deeply disturbing topic that Noaz Deshe (*Search Agent Zerox*) explores through the experience of one young albino boy, Alias. Street-cast actor Hamisi Bazili puts in a restrained, naturalistic performance as the boy who's forced out of the bush after the murder of his father and thrust into the busy city, where he tries to keep a low profile while staying with his uncle, Kosmos. At first there appears to be safety in numbers, but the brutal underworld of the city is soon revealed.

While Alias goes about his business with a calm demeanour, a sense of dread hangs in the air. Every violent interaction on the streets is a reminder of the ruthlessness of the gangs who routinely attack and intimidate – and who are capable of shocking acts of brutality when faced with the prize of an albino. Rather than present a cat-and-mouse thriller, Deshe opts for an impressionistic approach, interchanging *vérité* techniques with surreal interludes. Alias indulges in fanciful conversations with his friend Salum, a younger albino who ironically claims to be a witch doctor in training. Dreamlike dialogue wafts over images out of sync with the actors' movements, creating a poetic mood that's routinely broken by blaring car horns and handheld camera shots of the city.

The narrative is elusive, with most events serving more as cultural context than plot progression. One scene sees a woman paying strangers to cry for her dead brother. Did he die of Aids, asks one stranger. No, a car accident, she assures them. Seen through the outsider eye of Israeli-born, Berlin-based Deshe, the city is awash with such involving



White hunter, black heart: Hamisi Bazili

exchanges. (It's worth noting that *White Shadow* comes with the Hollywood clout of another outsider, executive producer Ryan Gosling.)

Though overlong, *White Shadow* finds its power through its themes, mood and dramatic murder scenes, and deploys handheld camerawork to terrifying effect. Jerky and panicky, they're all the more arresting for their brevity and unseen horrors, as men with machetes burst into frame, hacking wildly while women and children wail bloodcurdling screams. This is the stuff of horror movies, brought into the world of arthouse *vérité* for the most tragic of reasons: a basis in fact. The press notes refer to 73 killings of albinos in Tanzania in five years, though *White Shadow's* Facebook page adds a more hopeful postscript, reporting a recent address from President Jakaya Kikwete promising to end the murders. Enforcement may be a challenge in the world depicted in *White Shadow*, where poverty breeds desperation and superstition is rife. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Ginevra Elkann
Noaz Deshe
Francesco Melzi D'Eril

Screenplay

Noaz Deshe
James Masson

Directors of Photography

Armin Dierolf
Noaz Deshe

Edited by

Noaz Deshe
Xavier Box

Production Designers

Smith Kimaro
Deepesh Shapriya

Soundtrack and Original Music

James Masson
Noaz Deshe

Sound Recording

Elie Chansa
Sandra Leutert

Costume Designers

Caren Miesenberger
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Shadowworks, Mocajo

Film, Chromosom

Filmproduktion,
French Exit

Production Companies

An Asmara Films,
Shadowworks, Mocajo

Film production

in co-production
with Chromosom

Filmproduktion,

French Exit,
Phantasma Films,

Real2Reel

with the support of
Nipkow Programme,

Goethe-Institut

Tanzania, Alliance
Française Dar es

Salaam, Cinelink

Plus - Sarajevo
Film Festival WIP

Executive Producers

Ryan Gosling
Stefano Gallini-
Durante

Cast

Hamisi Bazili
Alias

James Gayo

Kosmos
Glory Mbayuwayu

Antoinette

Salum Abdallah
Salum

Tito D. Ntanga

father
Riziki Ally

mother

James P. Salala
Adin

John S. Mwakipunda

Anulla

In Colour

[L85:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Aya Distribution

Not submitted

for theatrical
classification

Video certificate:

15
Running time:
116m 21s

Tanzania, the present. Alias, an albino boy who lives in a remote village, witnesses the violent murder of his albino father. His mother fears for his life in a country where albino body parts are sought out for witch-doctor potions. She sends Alias to the city and into the care of his uncle Kosmos, a truck driver.

Kosmos schools Alias in various trades such as hawking CDs and mobile phones. Alias's friend Salum follows him to the city. Kosmos is attacked by a group of thugs. He goes to the grave of his recently deceased wife; claiming that her burial spot has been taken by a 'whore', he takes his wife's body home. Alias, who has been growing closer to his young cousin Antoinette, crawls into her bed and they embrace. Kosmos discovers them and throws Alias out of the house. Kosmos is beaten up and thugs threaten to take his daughter; he appeases them by making promises. Alias finds shelter with a group of albino children and witnesses the murder of Salum, whose limbs are hacked off. Alias finds sanctuary with a religious man in a village. Police bring Salum's dismembered body to the village and demand information. The villagers hunt down the witch doctor they believe to be responsible, hang him, kill his henchmen and burn his house. They invite Alias to kill one of the men but he refuses and runs off.

Wild Card

USA 2014

Director: Simon West

Certificate 15 92m 16s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

William Goldman's novel *Heat* was filmed in 1986 as a Burt Reynolds vehicle, to no one's satisfaction: several directors were involved, and ensuing litigation lasted years. This second attempt, with a script also credited to Goldman, is pokey and structurally unbalanced. No blame should be assigned to ever game-lead Jason Statham, who handles his mere three fight scenes (choreographed by HK veteran Cory Yuen) with typical aplomb and remains charismatic even when reciting a ludicrous résumé that includes a Golden Gloves championship, lecturing on economics at Yale and learning karate in Tokyo.

This career précis is evidently not meant as parody, and its overstuffed nature mirrors *Wild Card's* overall unworldliness. The film's first act has Statham's quasi-mercenary Nick Wild helping his friend Holly (Dominik García-Lorido) exact revenge on rapist gangster Danny DeMarco (Milo Ventimiglia). The second act is a lengthy blackjack gambling sequence bearing no meaningful relation to its predecessor, as if multiple books in a franchise had been condensed into one. The third unites the two preceding acts, with Nick fending off Danny one last time and coming to terms with his self-sabotaging compulsive behaviours.

As in his previous film *Stolen*, director Simon West (replacing Brian De Palma, alas) displays execrable taste in colour correction, which is superfluous in a city as intrinsically garish as Las Vegas. Amusing scenery-chewing from Michael Angarano as an eccentric millionaire and a cameoing Stanley Tucci aside, *Wild Card* is anaemic, with Statham an unwieldy amalgam of his usual brutalist charms and a dozen disparate character traits. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Steven Chasman
Screenplay

William Goldman
Based on the novel

[*Heat*/UK title:
Edged Weapons] by

William Goldman
Director of

Photography
Shelly Johnson

Editors
Padraic McKinley
Thomas J. Nordberg

Production
Designer
Greg Berry

Music
Dario Marianelli
Production

Sound Mixer
Jay Meagher
Costume Designer

Lizz Wolf
Action
Choreographer

Cory Yuen
Stunt Co-
ordinators

Brad Martin
Ron Yuan

@SJ Heat

Productions, LLC
Production

Companies
SJ Heat Productions

presents in
association with

Sierra/Affinity and
Cinema Seven

Productions
A Simon West film

Executive
Producers
Nick Meyer

Marc Schaberg
Cassian Elwes
Robert Earl

Brian Pitt

Cast
Jason Statham

Nick Wild
Michael Angarano

Cyrus Kinnick
Milo Ventimiglia

Danny DeMarco
Dominik
García-Lorido

Holly
Anne Heche

Roxy

Sofia Vergara
Doris, 'DD'

Max Casella
Osgood

Jason Alexander
Pinky

Hope Davis
Cassandra

Stanley Tucci
Baby

Dolby Digital
In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

Las Vegas, the present. Nick Wild helps his friend Holly to take revenge on gangster Danny DeMarco, who raped her. Afterwards, Nick goes on a gambling spree, winning \$500,000, then losing it all. He kills Danny and his men and, with help from a millionaire client, leaves Las Vegas for Corsica.



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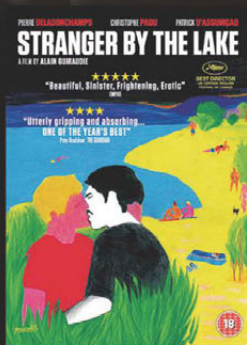
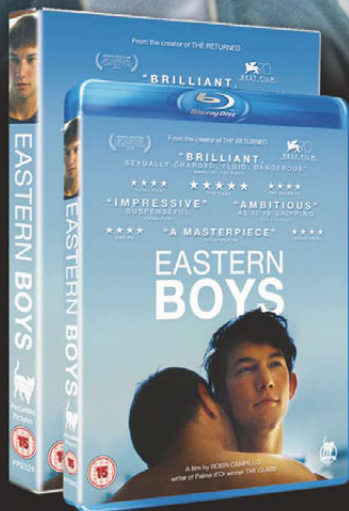


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Home cinema



Assisting with enquiries: Sean Connery as the enraged detective Johnson 'interrogating' suspected child molester Baxter (Ian Bannen)

ON THE EDGE

Sean Connery portrays a dangerously burnt-out detective in a complex and compelling study of 1970s corruption

THE OFFENCE

Sidney Lumet; UK 1972; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 112 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: video interviews with stage director Christopher Morahan, assistant art director Chris Burke, costume designer Evangeline Harrison and composer Sir Harrison Birtwistle; original theatrical trailer booklet with essay by Mike Sutton and archival interview with Sidney Lumet

Reviewed by Mark Fisher

"Was your father a big man?" With this cod-Freudian enquiry, Johnson (Sean Connery) seals his own fate and that of the man he is interrogating, Baxter (Ian Bannen). The encounter between the two – the one a dangerously burnt-out police detective, the other a suspected child molester – is at the heart of Sidney Lumet's *The Offence*.

It's difficult to think of another film that grasps the existential as well as the physical terrain of early 1970s Britain quite so powerfully as *The*

Offence does. It seems to take place at the edges of scenes from local television news reports and police appeals for public information, as if the cameras have kept rolling after the fingertip searches and the press conferences have finished. It is a study of a corruption that is a metaphysical condition more than it is a moral state. This is the 1970s as excavated by David Peace in the Red Riding Quartet, rendered, like Peace's work, in a mode in which naturalism gives way to a fraught expressionism. "The smell of death, chequered, splintered bones... filthy, swarming, slimy maggots in my mind, eating my mind..."

The Offence was filmed in Bracknell but you couldn't say it was set there. The place remains nameless in the film, a generic new town composed of underpasses, shopping precincts and tower blocks. *The Offence* surveys this anonymous landscape with a kind of insomniac vigilance, the hyper-lucidity of someone – like Johnson – who can't numb or intoxicate themselves no matter how much they drink.

This sense of place – or, rather, this attention to the placelessness of the new town – is one way in which Lumet lifts *The Offence* beyond its theatrical origins (it was based on a stage play, *This Story of Yours*, by Z Cars writer John

Hopkins). We're certainly far from theatre in the bravura opening sequence: a white light in the centre of the screen and an electronic drone (created by Peter Zinovieff) pitch us into a disassociative state, disconnected from the policemen who run, in hazy slow motion, towards the interrogation room. A simulation of breakdown: while others are gripped by a panicked urgency, Johnson – and it is his head we seem to be inside at this time – is frozen, a million miles away from the chaos he has caused.

Yet such sequences are not typical of *The Offence*. Most of the film consists of long, dialogue-heavy two-handed scenes, and if the film still betrays its theatrical provenance that is no doubt largely because of the speed with which it was put together. It was shot in March and April 1972 as part of a deal Connery struck with the producers of the Bond movies. In exchange for returning to the part of 007 in *Diamonds Are Forever*, Connery would be allowed to make two low-budget films. In the event, *The Offence's* commercial failure meant it was the only movie that was actually produced under the deal. Although it came in on time and under budget, its bleakness and its reputation for 'artiness' meant that it would not start making money until the 1980s.

The film is structured around three encounters: Johnson's fateful interrogation of Baxter, a later exchange with his wife (Vivien Merchant), and an interview with a superior officer (Trevor Howard). The Baxter interrogation is shown out of sequence, with the decisive scenes kept back until the end of the film. First of all – in the opening sequence – we see the aftermath: Baxter lying bloodied on the floor, Johnson looming over him. If the scenes with Baxter play like a psychoanalytic session, the question is: who is the analyst and who is the analysand? It is quickly clear that it is Johnson who will reveal more than Baxter, and at one particularly wretched moment, the policeman begs the suspect for help.

Commentary on the film has often remarked on the way that Johnson and Baxter seem ultimately to blur into one another. But this presupposes that Baxter is guilty, something that neither we nor Johnson know. (A tragic and bitterly ironic note is added by the fact that the last victim is still alive and in the hospital, and would presumably be able to identify her attacker, rendering the whole interrogation pointless.) We do, however, know that Johnson harbours paedophilic fantasies. The extraordinary scene in which he discovers the paedophile's victim in the woods is disturbingly revelatory: rather than immediately alerting the other police officers, he seems momentarily furtive, as if he has been caught in the act, and we almost entertain the thought that it is Johnson who is the paedophile. His abortive attempts to calm the girl, switching quickly from clumsy tenderness to undue force, only intensify our suspicions. This scene is later converted into a fantasy, in which the girl, now sunlit, lies smiling, giggling...

In the end, the contrasts between Johnson and Baxter are more telling than the commonalities. After all, like Johnson, we know almost nothing about Baxter – he enters the film when he is picked up wandering semi-insensate around the town, a catatonic enigma (just as Johnson ends it as a catatonic burnt-out case, open and shut). This very blankness is what allows Johnson to project so much on to him. Baxter's awareness of this projection and his mocking repudiation of it – don't blame me for the thoughts in your head – fatally ratchet up Johnson's rage.

Baxter himself draws out the most crucial difference between him and his antagonist, at a point in the questioning when he seems to be opening up to Johnson. Baxter says that he was bullied when he was younger but eventually realised that the power in the relationship wasn't simply held by the bullies. Whereas Baxter simply loathed the bullies, wanting to be rid of them, the bullies needed him. Johnson physically dominates Baxter, for sure. Indeed, as Christopher Bray points out in *Sean Connery: The Measure of a Man*, in *The Offence* Connery appears so much bigger on screen than he had ever done before. Gerry Fisher's camera is kept low whenever Connery is filmed, so that he looks like some lumbering giant among cowering striplings. Yet this physical power seems to correlate with a mental ponderousness, a transparency of motive and thinking, which means that



PC brigade: *The Offence*

Johnson is unable to keep up with events, and his violence is a reactive and belated attempt to assert a control that he no longer possesses.

When Johnson asks Baxter if his father was a big man, he poses the question with an artless earnestness that's painful to watch. We can see Johnson's pride in this reaching for off-the-shelf psychoanalytic wisdom. The detective thinks he has the better of Baxter now, that he has his trust. Baxter responds with uncontrollable laughter. A laughter that Johnson feared – he's laughing at us, the detective tells a fellow policeman at the beginning of the film – and now wants to silence. And which he will silence, by beating Baxter to death. Perhaps what Baxter and Johnson most share in common is an appetite for self-destruction. Johnson doesn't want to kill Baxter but he can't prevent himself from lashing out.

The violence is a series of outbursts rather than a sudden explosion. It's clear that Baxter is a phantasmatic figure for Johnson: a screen to project on to, a scapegoat who will be punished

The camera is kept low, so that Connery looks like some lumbering giant among cowering striplings

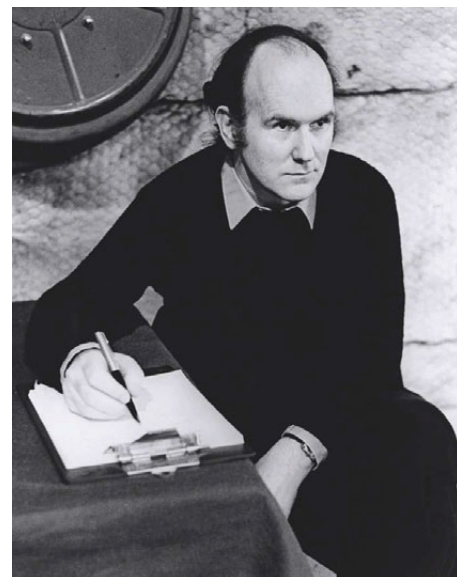


Connery with Trevor Howard

for all the bad things the detective has witnessed, a priest to whom he can confess and from whom, absurdly and pathetically, he seeks absolution. If Baxter has become a creature of fantasy, then Johnson can keep beating him for ever: he will always get up. Sadly, however, Baxter remains vulnerable flesh and blood and there is a point at which he will remain lying on the floor, never to rise again. Baxter fears Johnson's violence, flinches from it, but is unable to stop himself provoking it. One of the most enduring images in the film is of Baxter laughing, leering, through a mouthful of blood.

The savage exchanges with Johnson's wife – the pair of them emotionally punch-drunk, drained dry of affection, staying together only because there's nowhere else to go – establish that he is bitterly frustrated. He feels that she should be more attractive (you were never pretty), that she should make more effort (why are you wearing that? You look a mess), that she should want sex, not just endure it. It's clear that Johnson cleared up the excesses of the 60s more than he indulged in them, as we see from the flashbacks to the traumas that have broken him. For the most part, these are Freudian screen memories, the images (a squawking parrot, a railway line, a bloodied arm hanging limply from a child's cot) seared into Johnson's mind the moment before the full horror was disclosed.

Whereas most of the scenes take place in new-town settings – in the brutalist police station, in modernist flats and in new-build estates – these formative traumas seem to happen in Victorian terraced streets, in old railway sidings, in scrubby woodland. Johnson is a relic from an older world, and these horrors are the violent, obscene unconscious that new-town England can never concrete over. In one of the flashbacks we see a uniformed policeman – is it Johnson? – desperately running, whether towards or away from horror, we cannot tell. We do know that, for Johnson, there is no possibility of leaving the horror behind, no one he can hit hard enough to erase it all. ☹



Screenwriter John Hopkins

New releases

BABY LOVE

Alastair Reid; UK 1968; Network/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 92 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: image gallery, press materials PDF

Reviewed by Vic Pratt

The promo campaign for *Baby Love* – executive-produced by Soho club owner and exploitation old hand Michael Klinger – lewdly pushed the film as a kind of low-rent *Lolita*. Quite aside from the eyebrow-raising title, the poster depicted Linda Hayden (in her debut role) in teenage-temptress mode, school-uniform skirt hitched up high, striking a pose in front of a mirror, wherein could be glimpsed her naked reflection. Nearby was emblazoned the suggestive strapline: “Would you give a home to a girl like Luci?”

But some mac-wearers lured in to see it may have been disappointed. Amid the sexploitation trappings lurked something cerebral – the splendidly lush Euro-porno-style score barely disguises the fact that, aside from a smattering of gratuitous nudity, impropriety is deftly implied rather than seen. Titillation takes second place to frustration in *Baby Love*, and nobody in this bleak, fascinating film seems to find much pleasure – sordid or otherwise – in anything.

Hailing from a rundown northern town, Hayden's 15-year-old Luci is orphaned when her mother (Diana Dors, in a memorable cameo) commits suicide. Luci moves in with one of mum's ex-boyfriends – a successful doctor (Keith Barron) now leading a respectable, affluent, middle-class life down south with his wife (Ann Lynn) and their son (Derek Lamden). Developing a taste for better things but filled with bitterness, Luci sets about seducing them all, using her sexual wiles to disrupt their decadent lifestyle.

Hayden is superb as the troubled teenager, in floods of childish tears one minute and snarling, “I'm going to paint my face... and be utterly evil” the next. Director Alastair Reid conjures up a frozen world of middle-class ennui for Luci to fracture, delineated by dreary card games and drunken marital disputes in drafty, football-pitch-sized beds, where awkward feelings are quashed by yet another cognac from the crystal decanter.

Disc: A crisp new transfer from original elements.

LA CIENAGA

Lucrecia Martel; Argentina 2001; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 101 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interviews with Martel and Andrés Di Tella, trailer, essay by David Oubiña

Reviewed by Jordan Cronk

A cesspool of booze, bodies and bourgeois decadence provides the setting for Lucrecia Martel's *La ciénaga*. Echoing the abstract, volatile elements of such an environment, the film never settles into a clearly delineated narrative, instead plunging the viewer into the deep-end drama of an overprivileged yet understimulated family gathered at their secluded summertime chateau.

When Mecha (Graciela Borges), the matriarch of the family, falls down drunk in the opening scene, slicing her chest on broken glass, her injuries prompt the arrival of her son (Juan Cruz Bordeu), cousin (Mercedes Morán) and a motley crew of kids who'd rather hunt, sunbathe or watch a nearby bog claiming the lives of local wildlife than tend to their aunt and her prickly personality.

La ciénaga (literally ‘the swamp’) may have been Martel's first feature but she shows confidence both in her capabilities and in the intelligence of her audience. The film brims with offhand details and digressions: relationships and past transgressions are hinted at but rarely explicated; arguments are instigated but only occasionally followed through; and though violence consistently simmers behind the familial facade, it never fully devolves into bloodshed. Martel's striking compositions, meanwhile, further articulate the unspoken. Tight framings and claustrophobic spaces abound, while humidity drapes her images in a dank, tangibly moist celluloid membrane, allowing the landscape to convey what might be called the metaphysical mystery at the heart of the film. In fact, more is implied in the use of offscreen space and peripheral ambience than in what's actually visualised or spoken aloud, anticipating the abstractions of Martel's *The Headless Woman* (2008).

Disc: Criterion's Blu-ray transfer preserves the clammy, subtropical feel of the film. In one of two included interviews (the other with compatriot Andrés Di Tella), Martel is enduringly enigmatic, which is appropriate for an artist whose career has only grown ever more elusive since.

CULT OF THE DAMNED (ANGEL, ANGEL DOWN WE GO)

Robert Thom; USA 1969; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray; 93 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: theatrical trailer, commentary track by Nathaniel Thompson and Tim Greer, stills gallery

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

The late Paul Bartel once told me about his problems with Robert Thom's original script for *Death Race 2000* (“It was all leather, whips and chains... impossible”); I'd have guessed he was exaggerating if I hadn't seen Thom's only film as director, *Angel, Angel, Down We Go*, which finally turns up on home video under its post-Manson killings rerelease title *Cult of the Damned*. This is 100 per cent a film of its moment – specifically, the acid-crazed moment when American International Pictures, sparked by Columbia's grosses on *Easy Rider* and emboldened by its own successes with *The Trip* and especially *Wild in the Streets*, made an ill-advised bid for the big time by producing this and Cy Endfield's *De Sade*. Also, of course, the moment of Russ Meyer/Roger Ebert's *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, an LA satire which Thom's film sometimes resembles.

It's a down-the-line bad-trip movie, seen through the fucked-up eyes of Tara Nicole Steele (played by plus-size folkie Holly Near, later a feminist activist, the Beth Ditto of her day), who is not so much an unreliable narrator as a paranoid liar in deep denial. She opens the film assuring us, “It's not true my father was a homosexual” – heard over a shot of daddy (an aerospace magnate played by Charles Aidman) sharing his shower with his latest toyboy – and then moves on to her equally ‘perfect’ mother with “It's not true that she made stag films” as we see mummy (played, incredibly, by Jennifer Jones) undergoing her daily beauty regimen. We're spared flashbacks to Astrid Steele's tawdry past, but Thom

does give Jennifer Jones the line “I made 30 stag films, and I never faked an orgasm.”

The minimal plot turns on Tara falling in with the malign sub-Jim Morrison rocker Bogart Peter Stuyvesant (Jordan Christopher), tripping to excess with his entourage (which includes Roddy McDowall and Lou Rawls!), and finally imagining him killing both her hated, neglectful parents. Thom relies heavily on cutaways to crude collages by Shirley Kaplan to suggest Tara's lysergic dreams, with the odd Tarzan-inspired fantasy thrown in for dramatic effect. He also deploys some moderately opulent settings and several (abysmal) songs by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil to suggest a budget well spent. But it's clear from the barrage of literary and movie quotes that Thom (who died in 1979, aged only 49) took the project very seriously indeed. When he gives McDowall in one of the many acid-trip scenes some gay lines originally improvised by Eric Emerson in Andy Warhol's *The Chelsea Girls*, he sets out to merge fringe Hollywood with the East Coast avant garde. The result really does have to be seen to be believed.

Disc: The serviceable anamorphic transfer is also available on a Region 1 DVD. The first half of the well-researched commentary track by Nathaniel Thompson is genuinely informative, despite redundant interjections from a colleague, but both run out of things to say in the later stages.

DARLING

John Schlesinger; UK 1965; StudioCanal/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 118 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: original trailer

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Jaunty, heartless and stylistically nimble right from its knowing primary-school-to-poster-girl opening montage, John Schlesinger's Swinging London picaresque has a shrugging confidence and stinging cynicism that have weathered well. The irony-filled gap between careerist model Diana Scott's heartfelt narration and her ruthless bed-by-bed social ascent still packs a punch, even as the film's cruder satirical attempts (a tantrums-and-tiaras charity auction, a cod-Fellini decadent parlour game) have lost theirs.

If *Darling* lacks the warmth of *Billy Liar* (1963) or the emotional heft of *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), its strong suit is its gimlet eye, ever alert to the hypocrisies of the bedroom and Laurence Harvey's career-making boardroom. Frederic Raphael's spiky



Eye to the main chance: Julie Christie in *Darling*

BLOOD, SWEAT AND FEAR

Raymond Bernard was once hailed as one of France's top directors. His ferociously authentic WWI movie reminds us why

WOODEN CROSSES

Raymond Bernard; France 1932; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region 2 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 115 minutes; 1.19:1; Features: interviews with Raymond Bernard, Roland Dorgelès and historians Marc Ferro and Laurent Véray, documentaries (on the restoration, early sound design and war artist Adrien Barrère), WWI photographs by André Schnellbach, vintage newsreels, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Reputations fade, and once fêted names slip into the shadows – sometimes with good reason. But now and then a film, or even a whole body of work, will resurface to suggest that the neglect was less than justified, and that the accepted canon needs some drastic revision.

In the 20s and early 30s, Raymond Bernard ranked high among French directors; the son of eminent playwright and novelist Tristan Bernard, he filmed adaptations of several of his father's plays before joining the newly formed Société des Films Historiques and directing its first production, *Le miracle des loups* (1924). Set in the reign of Louis XI, it was a lavish spectacle that became the most popular French movie of the year – and the first film ever to be screened at the Paris Opéra.

Bernard scored several more prestigious hits during the silent era, notably *The Chess Player* (*Le Joueur d'échecs*, 1927) and *Tarakanova* (1930). But the collapse of the SFH and of its backers Pathé-Natan in the mid-1930s, and the shifting of critical fashion to the work of Renoir, Feyder and Carné, left Bernard struggling to find subjects worthy of him. Forced into hiding during the occupation (he was Jewish), he resumed his career after WWII and continued directing until 1958, but never regained his former status. In 1965 Georges Sadoul faint-praised him as “an honest, conscientious and professional director”.

And there he might have stayed, a footnote in the history of French cinema, were it not for Criterion and, following their example, Eureka. In 2007 Criterion released a box-set of two of Bernard's early sound-era films, *Wooden Crosses* (*Les Croix de bois*, 1932) and *Les Misérables* (1934), in the bare-bones Eclipse series. Last December, Eureka's Masters of Cinema gave us the 288-minute three-part *Les Misérables*, the finest screen version so far of Victor Hugo's much adapted monster of a novel, showcasing a towering performance by Harry Baur as Jean Valjean. Now Eureka have followed up with *Wooden Crosses*, which reveals itself to be one of the most searing, visceral and uncompromising films ever made about WWI.

Wooden Crosses is adapted from a 1919 novel by Roland Dorgelès, who had served in the war as a corporal in the 39th Infantry Division. The script



Sound and fury: *Wooden Crosses*


sticks closely to the book; Dorgelès co-scripted with Bernard, and was present throughout much of the shoot. The entire male cast were veterans of the trenches, and almost all the exteriors were shot on the very same battlefields they and their comrades had fought and suffered over little more than a decade earlier. As one of the film's lead actors, Charles Vanel (whom Bernard subsequently cast as Valjean's nemesis Inspector Javert in *Les Misérables*), remarked, “We didn't have to act; we simply had to remember.”

At the heart of the film is a sustained 15-minute battle sequence, rarely equalled before or since for its intensity: a relentless visual and aural cacophony of explosions, machine-gun fire, mud, smoke, wire, shattered buildings, scurrying or dying men and incessant, ear-shattering noise. It's punctuated only by fragments of urgent dialogue, two brief cutaways to the complacent staff-officers back at base (“They're a tough regiment, they'll get through”) and a reiterated onscreen title: “ET CELA DURA DIX JOURS... DIX JOURS... DIX JOURS.” (“And that went on for 10 days.”)

Set on achieving maximum sound fidelity, Bernard experimented with microphone placement. At first, the massive explosions simply burst the mics; but finally, in a pioneering excursion into multi-tracking, he positioned up

to a dozen microphones at various distances, recording them on 12 separate tapes and then mixing and balancing the results. The effect is overwhelming. A different but no less telling use of sound comes earlier, when the platoon, stationed in a dugout on the front line, hear rhythmic thumps from below and realise that the Germans are tunnelling beneath them, preparing to blow them up. Ordered to stay put by their officers, their nerves screaming, the men wait out several interminable days, praying that the subterranean thudding won't stop before they're relieved.

Camaraderie aplenty but no heroics, no patriotic speeches. In its earth-bound directness and ferocious authenticity *Wooden Crosses* ranks as one of the most powerful and effective war movies ever made. Beside it, Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) – often reckoned the gold standard of WWI films – with its studio-built sets, smooth lighting and literary dialogue, looks tame and sanitised. Hollywood recognised the exceptional qualities of Bernard's film; Fox bought the rights and exploited chunks of its footage in Frank Lloyd's *Cavalcade* (1933) and John Ford's *The World Moves On* (1934) before producing an unofficial remake in Howard Hawks's *The Road to Glory* (1936). All to infinitely less effect.

In terms of the release, Eureka have gone two up on Criterion here. First in having the benefit of Pathé's scrupulous 2014 4K restoration, and second in adding a generous wealth of extras: not least an interview with Bernard, still lucid and eloquent, shortly before his death in 1977. 

It ranks as one of the most powerful war movies ever made. Beside it, 'All Quiet on the Western Front' looks tame

Revival

OUT OF THE ASHES

Seven decades on, Rossellini's war films emerge as powerful monuments to Europe's past – and to Italian film history

ROBERTO ROSSELLINI: THE WAR TRILOGY

ROME, OPEN CITY/PAISA/GERMANY YEAR ZERO

Roberto Rossellini; Italy 1945/46/48; BFI/Region B Blu-ray (limited-edition box-set)/Region 2 DVD (separate releases); 103/125/73 minutes; Certificate 12/PG; 1.37:1; Features: Rossellini's *L'amore* (1948, 80 minutes), documentaries ('Children of Open City' 'Into the Future'), booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Rome, Open City has such a daunting (and amply merited) reputation as the foundation stone of modern Italian cinema that it's easy to forget how well it works as entertainment: if it weren't for the fact that it was shot on the streets of war-devastated Rome and cast with locals who'd recently lived through events reconstructed on screen, it could be marketed simply as a pacy resistance-vs-Gestapo thriller. And one shouldn't downplay this aspect: it undoubtedly helped its considerable commercial success at a time when international interest in Italian cinema was effectively non-existent. Anna Magnani, too, was unknown abroad and considered a light comedienne at home, but she's so forceful here that her mid-point death (one of 1940s cinema's great shock moments) might have unbalanced a lesser film. Instead, the final act turns into a heartfelt, viscerally powerful paean to the courage of individual resistance activists (led by Aldo Fabrizi's mulishly stubborn priest), unmatched in impact until Jean-Pierre Melville's *Army of Shadows* a quarter of a century later.

The six-episode structure of *Paisà* means that it's unavoidably more diffuse, although Rossellini injects plenty of variety by virtue of setting each episode in a different Italian location (mirroring the US campaign, the film lands at Sicily and heads northwards in stages to the Po valley, visiting great cities and anonymous caves and swamps along the way). The film's intended propaganda value, emphasising brotherhood between Americans and Italians, is constantly offset by Rossellini's treatment: the shifting relationships between the fish-out-of-water GIs and the more worldly but less travelled Italians they encounter constantly lead them up unexpected alleys (both literally and metaphorically). Each story is a miniature morality play based around a clash of opposites, their differences marked by nationality, age, race, sex, class and religion.

In a booklet essay accompanying this release, Rossellini's biographer Tag Gallagher questions the (at the time non-existent) label 'neorealist' to convey what Rossellini is doing here – the fact that this is the film that inspired the teenage Paolo and Vittorio Taviani to become filmmakers may be more revealing of its aims and



Miniature morality plays: *Paisà*

achievements, specifically a vision of Italy that's both instant snapshot and timeless monument.

Germany Year Zero fuses a documentary portrait of a shattered 1947 Berlin with an exploration of the place's physical and psychological effect on a 12-year-old boy who would only have been four when Poland was invaded. Too young to support his family by conventional means, he's taken under the wing of an unemployable former teacher whose unrepentant belief in Nazi ideology poisons the child's mind as surely as Hitler poisoned his nation's only a few years earlier. It's an admirably tough treatment of an unsympathetic topic – it's easy to see why the film found few friends at the time. But now, when historians are exploring this period in ever greater depth, it's just as vital a text as its predecessors.

And then there's *L'amore*, unfairly relegated to 'extra' status for this Blu-ray box-set (on the separately released DVDs, it accompanies

The final act of 'Rome, Open City' is a heartfelt, viscerally powerful paean to the courage of individual resistance fighters



Casualties of war: Anna Magnani and Aldo Fabrizi in *Rome, Open City*


Germany Year Zero) but equally important as a showcase for the gifts of both Rossellini and Magnani (his then lover), not to mention regular screenwriting collaborator Federico Fellini, making a rare acting appearance as the shepherd mistaken for the reincarnation of St Joseph by Magnani's deluded goatherd. But, as with the dog Micia in the film's first episode, he proves merely a foil for Magnani in what amounts to a virtuoso two-part one-woman show.

As with Satyajit Ray's early work, there's a pervasive assumption that the challenging circumstances of their production will always leave Rossellini's mid-1940s films looking a bit ropery. Thanks to a gorgeous digital restoration by the L'Immagine Ritrovata lab in Bologna, however, *Rome Open City* rivals almost any other film of its decade, with only very occasional allowances needed for hastily grabbed out-of-focus shots or visibly differing film stocks. The high-definition presentations of *Germany Year Zero* and *L'amore* also look very impressive, and even the notoriously problematic *Paisà* mainly suffers from very fine scratches that are easy enough to tune out.

L'amore aside, the biggest extra is Laura Muscardin's engaging 2005 documentary *Children of Open City*, which revisits locations, interviews the now elderly child actors and the descendants of deceased adult participants, and digs up archival newsreels and interviews with Rossellini, Fabrizi and Magnani. Tag Gallagher is a talking head here, and he gets his own solo showcase with the video essay *Into the Future* (2009); his fellow booklet essayists are Jonathan Rosenbaum, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Paul Fairclough.

That this is an essential purchase goes without saying: it's hard to think of another recent release that crams so much vital Italian film history (and history in general) into a single package. **S**

New releases

 script dissects Diana's *modus operandi* mercilessly: "Your idea of fidelity is not having more than one man in bed at the same time." Yet there's a curious dissonance between Julie Christie's restless Diana, the quintessence of 60s New Womanhood, and the film's class-bound 50s view of London life. Where *Georgy Girl* and *Alfie* are exuberant about the new British youth culture, *Darling* sidesteps it. But Christie's thin-skinned Oscar-winning performance brings pathos to the film's misogynistic morality tale, which extended even to the original knicker-pink poster: "Shame, shame, everybody knows your name!"

Disc: The DVD transfer is pin-sharp, its pearly monochrome good looks intact, but this is a bare-bones release.

EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF

Jean-Luc Godard; France/Switzerland 1980; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 88 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: Godard short 'Scénario de Sauve qui peut (la vie)', video essay by Colin McCabe, interviews, Godard's 1980 appearances on 'The Dick Cavett Show', 'Godard 1980', essay by Amy Taubin

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Famously the moment when Godard, having owned the 60s and subsequently entered into a decade-long midlife crisis of Marxist cant and unreleasable video asceticism, emerged into the public air once more, *Every Man for Himself* is the restored and Blu-rayed JLG keystone we've been waiting for. Initially released in the UK, rather prosaically, as *Slow Motion*, it's a proto-Godardian essay-cum-sociological drama, but different to what came before. For one thing, the new Godard was more genuinely romantic; the self-inspecting, Anna Karina-infused romance of the 60s had been offset by genre irony, but starting here Godard left genre ideas behind and allowed himself to become besotted with loveliness, and heartbroken by its inevitable loss.

At the centre of the weave is the high-temperature battle of the sexes between Jacques Dutronc's TV producer/JLG avatar and his dissatisfied ex-girlfriend-to-be Nathalie Baye, and between self-possessed young prostitute Isabelle Huppert and the men of the world at large. While he's as ambivalent as he usually is about everything, Godard's portrayal of men at the mercy of their own sexual childishness and brutality is surprisingly sharp and pure.

But of course the form defies the content, and the characteristically slippery current of the film plays all kinds of games, including a bout of hide-and-seek with the unseen Marguerite Duras (whom Dutronc invokes to a class of high schoolers as refusing to budge from the next room; when asked years later what this was about, Godard confessed that she *was* actually in the next room).

Toying with our reactions to, and preconceptions about, domestic violence, sexual autonomy, romantic possibility, female objectification and the tragedy of passing time, the film is an integral landmark in Godard's career, and therefore in the history of film.

Disc: Arguably Godard's first conscientiously gorgeous colour film, it luxuriates in its new digital spruced-up skin. Among the cache of supplements, the fascinating standouts are



Wife swapping: *Kiss Me, Stupid*

Huppert's new interview (revealing that in order to cast her, Godard flew to Montana during the shoot of *Heaven's Gate*), and the *Dick Cavett Show* interviews, in which the filmmaker proves himself to be a riotous and poetic interviewee, despite his legendary public taciturnity.

GOD TOLD ME TO

Larry Cohen; USA 1976; Blue Underground/Region A Blu-ray; 90 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary with Larry Cohen, interviews with star Tony Lo Bianco and special-effects artist Steve Neill, two Q&As with Cohen, theatrical trailer, TV spots, poster and stills gallery

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Much of the supplementary material accompanying Blue Underground's Blu-ray release of *God Told Me To* emphasises the on-the-fly resourcefulness that allowed the low-budget shoot to attempt epic dimensions. A seasoned raconteur, director Larry Cohen can be found on the extras describing infiltrating a uniformed Andy Kaufman into the New York City St Patrick's Day parade, where he makes his film debut as a possessed cop. Full of this kind of 'stolen' street footage, *God Told Me To* particularly likes religious feast days, grabbing another scene during Little Italy's Feast of San Gennaro – a fitting atmosphere for a film that deals with an epidemic of religious murders gripping the city, investigated by police detective and tortured Catholic Peter Nicholas (Tony Lo Bianco). Cohen's pilfering doesn't stop there: when Lieutenant Nicholas finally links the crimes to two immaculate conceptions preceded by alien abductions, the incidents are recreated using footage from *Space: 1999* (1975-77), as well as a pulsating vaginal slit courtesy of special effects whiz Steve Neill.

In the final product there's much that testifies to multi-hyphenate Cohen's ingenuity as a producer, though as a writer/director his reach often exceeds his grasp by a considerable distance. His films suffer from a combination of prolixity and – save for the occasional good set piece, such as a knife ambush on a dark tenement staircase – an absence of immediacy that belies their improvisatory origins. Cohen makes good use of Hollywood relics, in this case a poignant Sylvia Sidney, as he would in

his next film, *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (1977) – though political scheming is more in his wheelhouse than religious anguish, a theme that seems to have been chosen more for marketability than personal conviction. One only needs to put *God Told Me To* next to Martin Scorsese's Manhattan inferno of 1976 to see the relative paucity of Cohen's accomplishment.

Disc: Given the subject matter, calling the transfer 'immaculate' seems apt – and accurate. The Blu-ray recycles a William Lustig/Cohen commentary track recorded in 2003, much as Cohen would recycle this film's seemingly omniscient rooftop shooter in his script for 2002's rotten *Phone Booth*.

KISS ME, STUPID

Billy Wilder; USA 1964; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 125 minutes; 2.35:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

There is a scene in the 1930 German silent *People on Sunday* in which a young couple have a jealous spat about their favourite movie stars: she prefers Willy Fritsch, he goes for Greta Garbo. I don't know who wrote this bit of business – the movie was a collaboration between young Turks Curt and Robert Siodmak, Edgar G. Ulmer and Billy Wilder, among others – and perhaps it doesn't matter. What's notable is that the scene illustrates what was then a new concept: the manner in which mass-market fantasy had begun to colonise the erotic imaginations of ordinary folks. And this, transferred to mid-century America in the television era, would be the subject of Wilder's *Kiss Me, Stupid*, a deeply ambivalent film about desire and the cathode ray tube.

Kiss Me, Stupid concerns a snowballing series of misunderstandings that put an elaborate game of role-playing and partner-swapping into play. When TV crooner Dino (Dean Martin, parodying himself, as he amiably did throughout his career) breaks down in Climax, he's waylaid by piano teacher/part-time songwriter Orville J. Spooner (Ray Walston), who hopes to make his big break selling Dino some of his tunes. Scheming to cater to Dino's womanising ways, though afflicted with terrible jealousy, Spooner chases his wife Zelda (Felicia Farr) out of the house and brings in a ringer in the form of local prostitute Polly (Kim Novak), who will pose as his spouse so that Dino can cuckold him without too much pain.

Those looking for evidence of Wilder's misanthropy have found much to comment on here, including the film's rather breezy attitude towards infidelity and Walston's cuckoo performance of mercenary desperation, full of lunatic line-readings that may burn into your cerebellum. This, along with Martin's performance and cracks about the Sinatra kidnapping, lend the humour an almost postmodern air, and the movie today seems startlingly contemporary. The delivery of the title line as kicker even anticipates the ending of *Eyes Wide Shut*, another late work on temptation that exhibits everything its author has learnt.

Disc: A vindication of Wilder and DP Joseph LaSelle, who've combined here to shoot some of the best widescreen black-and-white photography in American movies not lensed by Jimmy Wong Howe.

Television

SHERLOCK HOLMES

BBC; UK 1964-65; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 650 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: interview ('Douglas Wilmer... on Television', 2012), alternative Spanish audio for 'The Speckled Band', alternative title sequence for 'The Illustrious Client', reconstruction of 'The Abbey Grange' (with Wilmer reading original Conan Doyle story), reconstruction of 'The Bruce-Partington Plans' (with audio and rehearsal script), episode commentaries by Wilmer et al, booklet with complete cast lists, essays

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

It is possible that at this point, between Robert Downey Jr, Benedict Cumberbatch, Jonny Lee Miller (in the CBS update *Elementary*) and Ian McKellen (in *Mr Holmes*) and memories of Jeremy Brett, Peter Cushing and Basil Rathbone (not to mention Robert Stephens, Christopher Plummer, Nicol Williamson, Ian Richardson, George C. Scott and Michael Caine and so ad, it feels like, infinitum), you may feel you've had enough versions of Sherlock Holmes to be going on with. Even so, there are good reasons to take a look at these 13 BBC dramatisations from the mid-60s.

The first is Douglas Wilmer. Whether he is the best screen Holmes, as some ardent Sherlockians maintain, I leave to your personal taste, but there's a strong case to be made for him as the Holmes closest to Conan Doyle's conception. Of course, that conception was changeable and contradictory – one of the impressive things about Brett's portrayal in the Granada versions of the 80s and 90s was the way he reconciled so many of the contradictions. But that was a Holmes congenial to the late 20th century – ironic, playful, intermittently epicene. Something genuinely Victorian seems to cling to Wilmer – virile, decisive, a sportsman as much as an artist, drug-taking and violin-playing discussed rather than displayed. With the exception of Peter Cushing, whose joyless incarnation took over for the second series, Wilmer's Holmes is the straightest (in all senses), the one freest of any urge to wink at the audience, least constrained by search for novelty: there's fun here, but it's Holmes rather than the actor who's having it.

This approach has costs, among them a tendency towards hamminess (so often the name we give to the naturalism of an earlier generation) – the faces Wilmer pulls as the poisonous fumes of the burning root begin to penetrate his brain in 'The Devil's Foot' teeter between terrifying and silly.

The contrast with Brett, in particular, is subtle and interesting: roughly speaking, Brett's Holmes is a self-consciously theatrical character somewhat at odds with a realistic world; Wilmer's is also theatrical but without the self-consciousness, comfortably fictional. His mildly declamatory style makes sense of Holmes's outbreaks of piety and deference, his occasional tendency to unbend iron pokers with his bare hands.

It's frustrating that he is tied to a dull Watson: Nigel Stock (who stayed on for the Cushing series) is at the bluff-idiot end of the spectrum – not quite Nigel Bruce's spluttering buffer but lacking the common sense and basic plausibility that David Burke, Edward Hardwicke and Martin Freeman brought to the part. Peter Madden's shrewd thug of an Inspector Lestrade is some compensation,



Sherlock Holmes Something genuinely Victorian seems to cling to Douglas Wilmer – his Holmes is virile, decisive, a sportsman as much as an artist

and the supporting casts contain some treats: Peter Wyngarde on unusually fine form as the wicked Baron Gruner in 'The Illustrious Client', enjoying a blatantly sexual tyranny over Jennie Linden; Patrick Wymark jovially sinister in 'The Copper Beeches', well matched by an alert, charming Suzanne Neve; and the unfamiliar (to me) David Andrews, excellent as the over-helpful shop assistant in 'The Red-Headed League'.

The series includes two stories – 'The Retired Colourman' and 'The Beryl Coronet' – that haven't been filmed otherwise, or not since the silent era. The scripts are by a variety of hands, notably the great radio playwright Giles Cooper; though some of them are padded to make the requisite 50 or 60 minutes, they are faithful to Conan Doyle – that is at least in part down to Wilmer, who ended up writing a fair amount of dialogue, both out of necessity (because the actors were working with scripts that had not been properly finished) and devotion to Conan Doyle. The series was shot on a tight budget, in black and white with fixed camera set-ups, but location shoots (Port Isaac for 'The Devil's Foot', and even a trip to France for 'The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax') add breathing space, and the directors offer occasional flashes of grander ambition – an eerie

overhead shot of a corpse on a mortuary table, a meditative Holmes swallowed by blackness so that only his face glimmers in the dark.

The 13 episodes were shot with TV cameras and (for outdoor scenes) 35mm film; what survives are 16mm film recordings made for overseas sale. The quality isn't fantastic, and varies, but it's not awful for the period. The presentation is meticulous; where episodes aren't complete, the reconstructions are satisfying: instead of the first reel of 'The Abbey Grange', for example, Wilmer (still going strong at 94) reads the first half of the original story; instead of the second reel of 'The Bruce-Partington Plans', the extant soundtrack is played over pages of the rehearsal script.

Otherwise, the features are disappointing: the booklet essays, aimed at Sherlockians, could do with more critical perspective, and the episode commentaries are worthwhile mainly if you have a special interest in the working lives of jobbing actors in the 60s. But the interview with Wilmer is fascinating – his impish (but understandable) dismissal of Nyree Dawn Porter's acting, his frank admission of his own reputation as a 'difficult' actor, and his account of disputes with the BBC over the turnaround of directors and shrinking rehearsal times: *plus ça change*. 📺

New releases



NO TREES IN THE STREET

J. Lee Thompson; UK 1959; Network/Region 2

DVD: Certificate PG; 93 minutes; 1.66:1. Features: original theatrical trailer, image gallery, promotional PDFs

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The creative team behind the archetypal kitchen-sink drama *Woman in a Dressing Gown* reunited for this study of hardscrabble working-class lives, which arrived just as director John Lee Thompson was clearly on a roll – his true-life prison study *Yield to the Night* (1956) and revisionist WWII offering *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958) remain among the best British films of their decade. As with *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, however, the determining creative imprint here is surely screenwriter Ted Willis, creator of landmark TV series *Dixon of Dock Green* and a longtime Labour activist eager to expose audiences to improving social-realist material. The film takes place on one of the East End's toughest streets: there isn't much food (but plenty of drink), the populace has an ambivalent relationship with employment and the police, and getting ahead means falling in with Herbert Lom's local crime lord, an immigrant who's hustled his way to a dodgy business empire.

A shocking exposé of 1959's broken Britain? Actually, no, since all of this unfolds in 1939, on a rather obvious Elstree backlot. From the era of the Angry Young Men, we're transported back to a world resembling the plays of Gorky or O'Casey – full of loveable rogues, fatalistic philosophising and a dusty garret setting – as Willis's script looks for answers but backs away from anything too political.

If that were all the film had to offer, notwithstanding porcelain-skinned Sylvia Syms's saintly heroine, it would hardly be worth reviving, yet it's framed by a glimpse of the same territory two decades later, where a young ruffian (18-year-old David Hemmings!) is going astray amid shiny new council blocks. Whether you read this bookend as complacently self-satisfied or a warning that progress is still required, the film's fascinating response to social history outweighs its old-fashioned, overripe drama.

Disc: An effective transfer of a clean print, though beware the slightly hysterical original trailer, which gives away a key plot point.

SPRING IN A SMALL TOWN

Fei Mu; China 1948; BFI/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 93 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: 'A Small Town in China' (1933), 'This Is China' (1946) MOI documentary short, illustrated booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Fei Mu's finely drawn and intimate study of duty disrupted by desire was a casualty of political history. Made in the brief period between the end of the Sino-Japanese war and the 1949 declaration of the People's Republic of China, it lay neglected for more than 30 years until its rediscovery by the China Film Archive in the 1980s, and is often considered the greatest of all Chinese films nowadays.

Delicately tracing the intrusion of old flame Zhang into the illness-withered marriage of trapped wife Yuwen, it's an emotionally subtle film novella, making much of principled repression in the mode of *Brief Encounter* (1945) or *Charulata* (1964). The carefully claustrophobic mood is amplified by the adroit *mise en scène*



Road movie: *No Trees in the Street*

(both the city walls and the war-wrecked family estates are as holed as the marriage) and the heroine's spare, mournful narration. The lead performances are similarly exquisitely reined in – as Stephen Teo noted, Fei Mu's on-set dictum was: "Begin with emotion, end with restraint!"

Eloquent grace notes abound – a furtive clasping of hands on a stolen walk, faltering feet on a garden path. Nonetheless, there's a pervasive wistful, erotic note sounded as Yuwen (a trembling Wei Wei) darts between swooning temptation and demure rectitude in her tortured exchanges with Zhang.

Disc: A surprisingly good transfer. The two shorts provided as extras add useful context and, in the case of the delightfully everyday Methodist missionary home movies, a shot of pure charm.

THE TALES OF HOFFMANN

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger; UK 1951; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 133 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: introduction by Martin Scorsese, interview with Thelma Schoonmaker, trailer, booklet

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Hoffmann marks the highpoint of two dazzling creative careers. *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* was the grandest opera of Jacques Offenbach, left unfinished at his death; and the film rates as the last triumphant hurrah of that great yin-yang partnership, Powell and Pressburger. Nothing they subsequently made together – *Oh... Rosalinda!!*, *The Battle of the River Plate*, *Ill Met by Moonlight* – approaches *Hoffmann* for sheer exuberant brio and baroque Technicolor extravagance run gloriously riot.

The suggestion for the film came from Sir Thomas Beecham, and it's he and the orchestra he founded, the RPO, who provide the score. Though 'the score' is something of an understatement; Powell opted to have the whole opera, music and singers, pre-recorded, and shot the movie in sync with the recording. Far from feeling restricted, he found the approach exhilaratingly liberating. It offered his ideal of 'a composed film', allowing him to shoot the movie as though it were on the huge silent stage at Shepperton. The camera could be speeded up or slowed with no risk of sound distortion; dancers – Robert Helpmann, Moira Shearer, Léonide Massine – could play their roles on screen, with the generally less agile singers furnishing the voices.

Hoffmann glories in its artifice, with not the least pretence at realism. Hein Heckroth's sets explore expressionism, surrealism and

gothicism, creating sumptuous effects with an astonishing economy of means, colour-coding romantic poet Hoffmann's amorous adventures as he pursues one doomed love after another: yellow/orange for the mechanical doll in Paris; burnished reds for the Venetian courtesan; blue and white for the consumptive singer on the Aegean island. As Hoffmann, Robert Rounseville is a little stiff, but it suits his character as the poor manipulated patsy. Helpmann and Massine, shamelessly hamming, more than compensate.

Disc: Superbly restored in 4K from original camera negatives, this looks stunning. Several minutes of footage, excised at Alexander Korda's behest, have been seamlessly restored.

WOMAN THEY ALMOST LYNCHED

Allan Dwan; USA 1953; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray; 90 minutes; 1.37:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

B-budget horse opera *Woman They Almost Lynched* didn't have the most distinguished start in the world, though with hindsight it's anything but run-of-the-mill. Writing about the film in the *New York Film Bulletin* in 1962, Andrew Sarris was circumspect: "I can't decide whether it's a question of vitality or vulgarity, but either way, this is not the kind of jaded filmmaking one usually expects in the lower depths."

Sarris was addressing himself to matters of form, and the touch of director Allan Dwan, a survivor of the D.W. Griffith period who, through the 50s, continued to produce genre work that combined a classical coherence with a splash of the tawdry. *Woman They Almost Lynched* is also noteworthy for its subject matter, for it's one of a handful of westerns released in the genre's heyday to give a central role to women. Released by Republic Pictures, who would break the bank the following year on another such film, Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar*, the film stars Joan Leslie as Sally Maris, a Michigan schoolteacher-turned-honky-tonk-queen.

In 1865, the last year of the Civil War, Sally finds herself trapped in Border City, a town straddling the Arkansas-Missouri line and thus the north and south. The city is held above the fray and kept peaceful thanks to a gynecocracy led by iron-fisted Mayor Courtney (Nina Varela) and her flunkies, who enforce neutrality via the hanging tree (the first dialogue spoken on screen: "Where is everybody?" "Up at the lynchin'"). They're far from the only tough dames in town, and Sally's romance with an incognito Confederate (soft-chinned John Lund) is but a sideshow to her rivalry with leather-trousered outlaw Kate Quantrill (Audrey Totter), which turns on a dime to a sisterly bond, though not before a knock-down-drag-out catfight.

The liquidity of both personal and national borders is a motif running through *Woman They Almost Lynched* – its merger of form and content. In the course of the film, sworn enemies become allies, a beardless youth (Ben Cooper) is revealed to be the notorious Jesse James, a man mistakes his long-lost sister for a harlot, and a bluestocking becomes a pistol-packing saloon-keeper. To witness such spectacle, you first have to travel to the Border City between Trash and Art.

Disc: A typically lean package from Olive. 🍷

Lost and found

CRY FOR ME, BILLY

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Beneath its classic western trappings, this 70s tale of a disillusioned gunman has a radical revisionist spin

By Vlastimir Sudar

William A. Graham was a veteran director who worked throughout his life but spent most of his career in television, despite an early break into film in the shape of *Change of Habit* (1969), the last Elvis Presley vehicle. He mostly flew under the radar – and when he died in 2013, aged 87, you had to look hard for an obituary.

But it was because of Graham's death that I happened on a very rare 35mm screening of his long-forgotten 1972 film *Cry for Me, Billy*. By the time of its production, Graham must have been fed up with run-of-the-mill TV fare and intermittent movie assignments, so he decided to assemble a group of talent – people who, like him, had it in them but simply couldn't get their lucky breaks to put them on the path to Hollywood – and make an independent film.

The resulting calling card might have been a tad too radical even for its time. That the film is all but forgotten today is hardly surprising, one reason being that it goes by a bizarre range of titles, including *Count Your Bullets*, *Face to the Wind* and sometimes also *Naked Revenge*. These multiple titles point to the fact that (although the film was at one point distributed by Warner), nobody seemed to know how to pitch it to audiences. In many respects *Cry for Me, Billy* looks like a classic western, though it contains a political twist that would nowadays qualify it as revisionist.

Cliff Potts is the Billy of the title, a lone gunman disillusioned with the world and his profession. He rides into a forsaken little town, where a group of Native Americans have been left penned out in the heat and forbidden anything to drink. Billy, more of a politically minded bohemian than a John Wayne offspring, disobeys this order and gives them water, which leads him into his first conflict with Don Wilbanks's cavalry sergeant, who believes killing Indians to be "God's revenge on the heathen".

When some of the Indians run away, the cavalry rides after them, having already killed those who didn't flee. As he too leaves town, Billy meets Little Sparrow, played by Potts's real-life wife Maria, credited here as Xochitl. Little Sparrow has managed to escape by leaving her robes behind, and so when Billy meets her she is stark naked.

Billy approaches Little Sparrow gently but it takes a while before he wins her trust. The two inevitably fall in love. At this point, the cavalry catches up with them, wreaking havoc and leading to a final shootout in which Billy kills a whole unit of soldiers. The ambush ends in a



Way out west: Clive Potts as Billy


Some commentators have criticised the film's 'nihilistic' view, but this is precisely where its strengths lie

tragedy that I won't reveal here – a final bleak note to an intriguing and unpredictable western.

Cry for Me, Billy holds to its classical tropes, with Billy riding into the sunset in beautifully crisp photography by Jordan Cronenweth (best known for his work on *Blade Runner*). With an elaborate score by Richard Markowitz (who was once a student of Arnold Schoenberg but who, like Graham, could not escape his TV past), the film also nods towards the New Hollywood of the time. The then unknown Michael Franks provided zeitgeisty folk songs,

one for Little Sparrow and one for Billy – anticipating Bob Dylan's songs about Billy's more famous namesake in Sam Peckinpah's *Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid* the following year. In Graham's film, the only friend warning Billy about the dangers awaiting him is played by Harry Dean Stanton, endowing the film with countercultural credibility.

Graham had a penchant for erotica, here elegantly encapsulated in a focus pull from a campfire to the two lovers, which is sadly replaced with a straight-cut on the old VHS transfer currently viewable on YouTube. Graham would later direct *Return to the Blue Lagoon* (1991), with a similar scene of bathing naked in nature. *Cry for Me, Billy* was saleable as sexploitation in its day, due to Little Sparrow's full nudity for most of her onscreen time, but any promise of titillation is quickly dispelled by a harrowing scene in which the American soldiers gang-rape her – we mainly see Billy's devastated face as he agonises over what he hears. Once the soldiers have left, Little Sparrow frees Billy but then kills herself – there is nothing left for her as a Native American, post-European conquest, but humiliation and abuse.

Some online commentators have criticised the film for its 'nihilistic' view, but this is precisely where its strengths lie. With the Vietnam War raging, it was perhaps to be expected that Graham would portray the US army as brutal, infantile, venal and cowardly. Here the title *Cry for Me, Billy* acquires an additional dimension. Since the Billy of the title could also apply to its director, did William Graham reflect on his position as a well-meaning white liberal, making the film his own exculpating cry? His uncompromising assault on America's attempt to justify its relationship with the 'others' within its borders makes this a worthy example of the kind of politically confrontational film that's no longer common today – either on television or in cinema. 

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'Evidently attempting to hitch the creaking wagon of the elegiac Western to the fading star of the youth movie, the makers... have come up with an extraordinary concoction in which the pubescent hero expresses a grizzled disillusionment with the way of the gun. For all its blood and gunplay, its determined message-mongering and colourful types... [the film] plods on its way with such torpid predictability that it remains wholly nerveless and characterless'

Richard Combs 'Monthly Film Bulletin', 1976

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MAN OF MYSTERY

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

By Peter Ackroyd, Chatto & Windus, 288pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780701169930

HITCHCOCK LOST AND FOUND

The Forgotten Films

By Alain Kerzoncuf and Charles Barr, University Press of Kentucky, 268pp, £28, ISBN 9780813160825

HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK

Selected Writings and Interviews, Volume 2

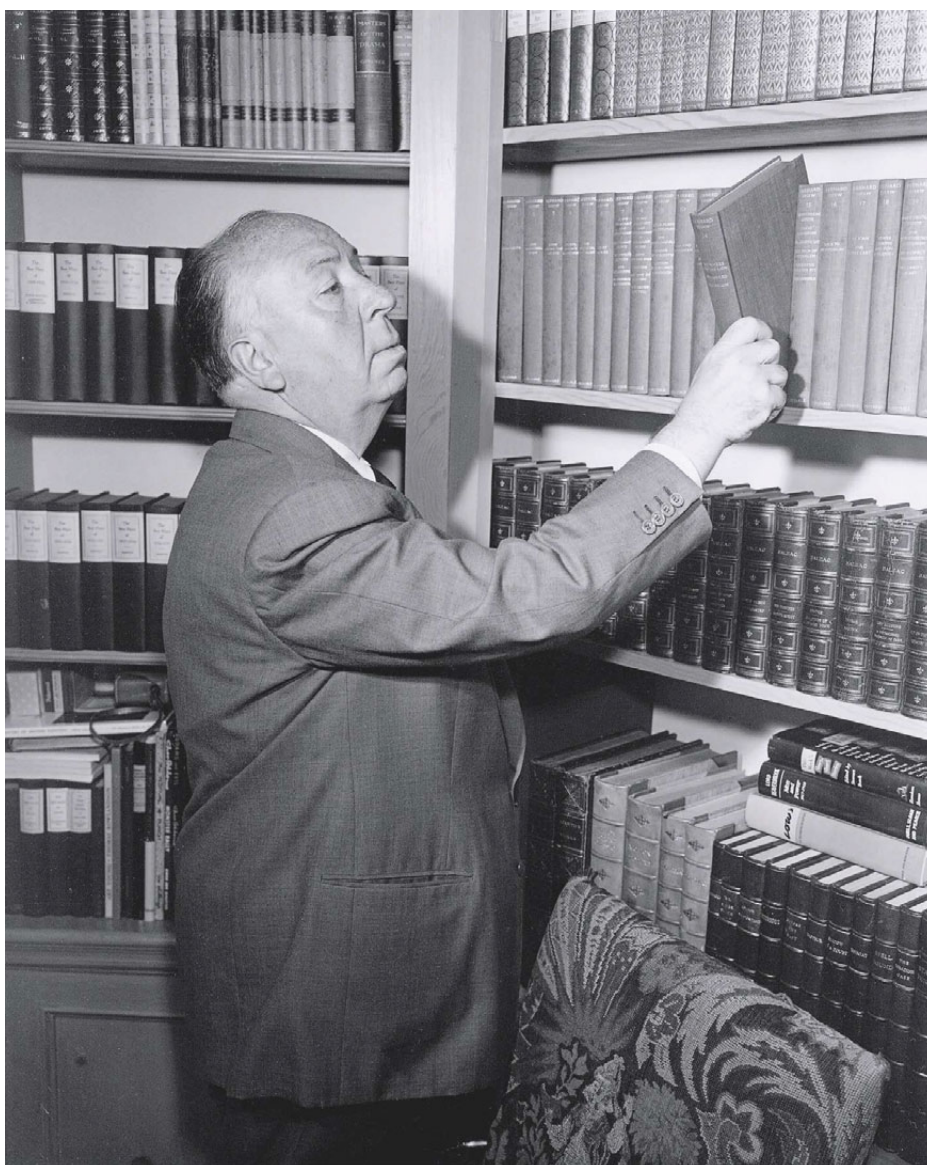
Edited by Sidney Gottlieb, University of California Press, 288pp, £24.95, ISBN 9780520279605

Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The question “Do we need another book about Hitchcock?” feels like part of the critical furniture these days. Surely everything that can be known, is known. Fifty years after the publication of Robin Wood’s *Hitchcock’s Films*, surely every theory that can be expounded with reference to his films, has been. Peter Ackroyd’s publisher’s promise of a new biography that “discovers what lurks in the corner of the shot” is therefore tantalising indeed. Sadly it is also shamelessly hollow: Ackroyd has discovered nothing. This must be high in the running for the most derivative and redundant Hitchcock book yet. All of Ackroyd’s anecdotes, which make up a high proportion of the text, are familiar from elsewhere, and he is ungenerous in crediting sources.

Obviously it is intended for non-specialist readers for whom these stories are probably newish, but the old biographies are still out there and Ackroyd has not improved on them; rather he has done a poor job of paraphrasing them. There are few outright howlers, but a steady drizzle of minor errors, infelicities and instances where he is not derivative enough, so that the construction “seems to be” is deployed where more information has in fact come to light. Equally obviously, the book is being sold on its author’s name as much as on its subject’s, but Ackroyd’s prose is by turns careless – we get the phrases “Once more it starred Ivor Novello” and “Novello was of course the lead” within three lines of each other – and purplish.

Sentences like “The use of light was its music; rising in intensity from *piano* to *forte*, and in the process creating a unique rhythm of meaning,” applied to Hitchcock’s debut, *The Pleasure Garden* (1926), may be nicely turned, but they are very probably meaningless. The root problem is



Man behind the mask: many aspects of Hitchcock’s inner life remain opaque despite intense scrutiny

Ackroyd’s seeming unfamiliarity with cinema. When he writes that Hitchcock’s discussion with Truffaut about the Kuleshov experiment – a film montage that showed how meaning is created through editing – was “one of the few occasions when Hitchcock betrayed any theoretical knowledge of what might be called cinematic aesthetics”, he betrays both his ignorance of Hitchcock and his underlying attitude (“what might be called”) towards what no end of well-credentialed people have long considered an artform, with a body of aesthetic theory to match.

Ackroyd gets into difficulty writing about the practice of filmmaking (“about two and a half minutes of film was shot each day”) as well as the theory (“a rapid montage suggests a

subjective point of view”), and struggles to give a coherent account of the films. His description of *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) – “The theatricality of the plot has mystical implications, also, with the sudden erasure of a name outlined in steam on a train window” – makes no more sense in context. It is somehow worse when he casually affects a knowledge of the wider scene that he clearly doesn’t have, so that André Bazin “was associated with the ‘auteur’ theory”, a ‘theory’ Ackroyd doesn’t understand in any case, suggesting that its exponents were unaware that directors collaborated with writers and cameramen and so on.

Ackroyd’s confidently phrased insights into his subject’s character turn out to be self-

contradictory or pure bluff. Hitchcock was “graceful to the point of gentility in his gestures and attitudes”, but then 12 pages later “an indefatigable gossip on sexual matters”. These are not signs of an appreciation of the director’s complexity but of authorial inconsistency. We need more books about Hitchcock, but now might not be the time for another birth-to-death, film-by-film run-through. There is, however, scope for a book on ‘Hitchcock’s London’, but while Ackroyd’s name on the spine might offer some promise on this front, it is here on his home turf that the book is most disappointingly thin. Early on there is a quotation from Henry James about the Thames, repurposed from Ackroyd’s *Thames: Sacred River*, but that is about all.

Alain Kerzoncuf and Charles Barr’s *Hitchcock Lost and Found* is not going to be anybody’s first Hitchcock book, nor even their second. The exact opposite of Ackroyd’s book, it is concerned with what appear to be some of the most obscure episodes in his career, and presents itself modestly as a “solid interim report”, in open dialogue with other research, ending with a to-do list. Yet a kind of coherence emerges, centring on a hitherto little-explored aspect of Hitchcock’s character: his personal relationships, both those which he seems to have cut off very sharply, and those which extended unexpectedly late into his career.

Hitchcock’s apprenticeship, his five-year rise from moonlighting title-designer to director in the early 1920s, a return to the field of Barr’s epochal *English Hitchcock*, gets the most sustained treatment. The authors’ central discovery concerns *Number 13*, the film young Hitchcock did not complete, about which almost nothing was known. Hitchcock joined the industry in 1920 (full-time from 1921), designing titles for the British branch of Famous Players-Lasky (which later became Paramount) in Islington, but by early 1922 the firm’s American controllers had decided to pull out, leaving the studio as a rental facility. At about this time, according to Hitchcock, a publicity woman at the studio in some way encouraged him to direct a film she had written, using Hitchcock family money. Two relatively well-known performers, Clare Greet and Ernest Thesiger, were hired; Greet, who is said to have put money into the film, and presumably lost it, went on to appear in seven further Hitchcock projects.

There were in 1922 four weekly film trade papers in Britain, and yet there is not a single mention of this production in any of them, despite their relatively comprehensive coverage of goings-on in the studios. Never shown in public, the film has remained a mystery throughout the decades, despite all the scrutiny that has been brought to bear on Hitchcock’s work, life and times. Kerzoncuf and Barr have delivered an out-and-out scoop, then, in giving us for the first time the writer’s name, the film’s plot and a number of never-before-seen stills. (Here I ought to declare a slightly baffled interest as an acknowledgee: my only involvement was to disagree quite strongly with one of the book’s findings to do with the film’s later life, but I am now persuaded.)

Another highlight is a discussion of


Hitchcock’s contribution to Sidney Bernstein’s unreleased ‘German Concentration Camps Factual Survey’, recently reconstructed by the Imperial War Museum and made the subject of the documentary *Night Will Fall* (2014). Kerzoncuf and Barr, having reminded us that Robin Wood connected this project with *Psycho* (1960), “look both back and forward from 1945 to find strong thematic links” with the rest of Hitchcock’s work. It was Peter Wollen who identified John Buchan’s phrase “civilisation anywhere is a very thin crust” as the key to the Hitchcock oeuvre; Kerzoncuf and Barr have discovered its echo in a book by one of the Bernstein film’s writers, future cabinet minister Richard Crossman, who wrote in 1947: “Dachau was the most recent [...] of a long series of experiences which all seemed to illustrate that European civilisation is not a stable and settled way of life, but a thin crust.”

The popularly known Hitchcock persona is largely the product of his television appearances and interviews from the 1950s onwards, consisting of a fairly small repertoire of repeated quotes and stories. Sidney Gottlieb’s *Hitchcock on Hitchcock* books are fascinating in part because they show how far back in Hitchcock’s career this process of self-creation went. The lack of candour and detail in the articles and interviews that Gottlieb has collected is bound to be frustrating, yet it is paradoxically revealing of

Peter Ackroyd’s ‘Alfred Hitchcock’ must be high in the running for the most derivative and redundant Hitchcock book yet

Hitchcock’s character. Though the mask never dropped, it changed over time. Among the most valuable items in this second volume is ‘An Autocrat of the Film Studio’, published in 1928, which from its first sentence, a prototype of his oft-repeated line about “photographs of people talking”, betrays, *pace* Ackroyd, a certain acquaintance with cinematic aesthetics.

As Gottlieb says, it is high time someone published the unexpurgated Truffaut-Hitchcock (and translator Helen Scott) interviews – the recordings available online reveal how much was left out of the book. Gottlieb himself provides a section, as well as two earlier Hitchcock-Truffaut interviews, the first of which, conducted with Claude Chabrol, appeared in the February 1955 *Cahiers du Cinéma* alongside Bazin’s classic of auteur-scepticism, ‘How Could You Possibly Be a Hitchcocko-Hawksian?’ It is always worth recalling that the young French critics considered *Under Capricorn* (1949) and *I Confess* (1953) the pinnacles of Hitchcock’s career; having indulged his questioners, Hitchcock ends the interview by admitting that he tailors his answers according to who is asking.

After all, he was from the beginning – Gottlieb prints his first national publication, from 1921 – ever conscious of his audience and how to manipulate it, or keep it in suspense. The art of suspense is the art of withholding information, and Hitchcock successfully kept out of sight much of his inner life. The depth of his religious feeling, the extent of his ‘Irishness’, the effect of his father’s death (when Alfred was 15), the nature of his married life, his politics – all remain somewhat opaque. There are still realms to be explored. 



Lost treasure: Hitchcock’s unfinished *Number 13* (1922), about which little has been known until now

BAZIN ON GLOBAL CINEMA 1948-1958

Translated and edited by Bert Cardullo,
University of Texas Press, 360pp, \$60,
ISBN 9780292759367

ANDRÉ BAZIN'S NEW MEDIA

Translated and edited by Dudley Andrew,
University of California Press, 300pp,
£19.95, ISBN 978052028357

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

André Bazin's film criticism was first made available to English-speaking audiences, albeit in a somewhat bastardised form, in the pages of this very magazine: shortly after his death in 1958, *Sight & Sound* published an abridged version of an interview Bazin had conducted with Roberto Rossellini and Jean Renoir about their early ventures into television. Since then, several edited collections of Bazin's work have appeared in English, including Hugh Gray's translation of volumes I and II of *What Is Cinema?*, the collection of essays that Bazin himself put together. Nevertheless, only 150 or so of his articles are easily available in translation to date: a shockingly small figure in light of the lasting impact Bazin's work has had.

Two new volumes, edited and translated by well-known and well-respected experts on Bazin, Bert Cardullo and Dudley Andrew, and featuring 92 essays in total, will go some way towards redressing this paucity. Both have been made possible by the 2010 opening of Yale University's electronic Bazin archive, which consists of an output of 2,600 pieces on a vast array of topics (a linked conference resulted in another collection of essays on Bazin's work, *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, also edited by Andrew); and, intriguingly, both are primarily interested in Bazin's reflections on what they call the 'systems' within which individual films are made and viewed.

For Cardullo, editor of *Bazin on Global Cinema*, these systems – or contexts – are “social, cultural, political and economic”. If the book's title suggests an interest in that strange beast known as ‘world cinema’, (a term that tends to imply films that stem from beyond Hollywood or Europe), its focus is largely on the way in which film fits into wider cultural systems. True, there are essays here on Kurosawa Akira's *Throne of Blood* (1957) and Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito* (1956), but so too are there pieces on the contemporary French cinema's relationship to its sociopolitical present (‘Cinema and commitment’) and on the cultural appropriation inherent in American remakes (Joseph Losey's *M: Remade in the USA*). The essays offer fresh insight into Bazin's interests beyond particular films and directors, but as a collection it doesn't quite cohere, and is strangely weighted down by nearly 150 pages of bibliographic and filmographical material. The latter will be a useful resource for Bazin scholars, but it's difficult to see the purpose of the exhaustive film credits in the age of IMDb.

Bazin's biographer Andrew is more strategic in his selection of material and more explicit in his concerns. *André Bazin's New Media* sees Bazin paying attention to the ‘new media’ of the 1950s. In subsections such as ‘Television and



Lost in translation: these volumes will help rectify the paucity of André Bazin's work in English

cinema’, ‘Cinerama and 3D’ and ‘CinemaScope’, articles appear not chronologically but in thematic groups, so that each piece seems to gloss or revise Bazin's preceding ideas on a topic, clarifying and adding nuance to his conception of the relationship between widescreen and film style, to give just one example.

Of course, there's a false coherence that results from Andrew's methodology, but it's fascinating nonetheless to compare these related pieces and it's to his credit that, in a preceding editor's note, he is transparent and reflective about the selection criteria used for the articles: published between 1952 and 1958, they all “address formats that challenge the standard cinema of the day” in a critical and cohesive manner. Such emphasis on sustained engagement also sets limits on the material: two pieces on sports reporting, for example, were excluded on the grounds that they were “more informational than analytical”. It's a shame, but then as Andrew himself puts it, we must “continue to work toward the moment when all his writings are available to be readily examined”.

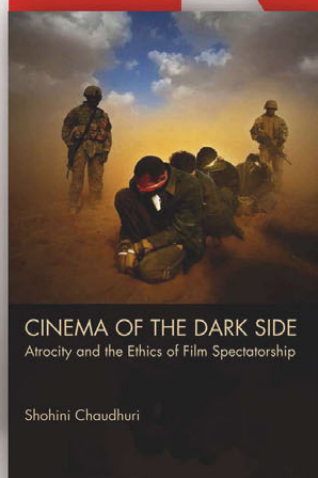
And as for the material that is available to us? Andrew's substantial introduction, tersely written yet eminently readable and always to the point, mirrors his eloquent translations

Bazin writes straightforwardly that the film that demonstrates the ‘ultimate worth’ of 3D is ‘House of Wax’, starring Vincent Price

of Bazin's essays, which are characteristically thoughtful, engaging and full of excitement about the cinema and its possibilities. They are also surprisingly democratic in their approaches to these new media: Bazin writes apparently quite straightforwardly that the film that demonstrates the “ultimate worth” of 3D is the 1953 *House of Wax*, starring Vincent Price (“We're not talking about a revolutionary masterpiece”, he admits, “but a film adroitly made and in a manner different from how it would have been made in the standard flat format”). He concludes that 3D is unlikely to knell the death of flat cinema, but will enhance certain genres – showing a remarkable prescience, some might say, with regard to the technology's current renaissance.

Indeed, it's the timeliness of such reflections, resonating as they do with our own era of new media, that makes *André Bazin's New Media* such a necessary read. Andrew closes the collection with what he rightly refers to as a final drumroll: ‘Is cinema mortal?’ is a gorgeous, prophetic piece of writing in which Bazin muses, “Perhaps ‘the cinema’ was in fact nothing but a stage in the vast evolution of the means of mechanical reproduction of which television is the most recent form.” Hypothesising a future generation of young critics of a new-form spectacle “that we cannot even imagine”, and picturing them smirking at his naivety and comparing him to those purists who reeled in horror at the advent of sound, Bazin is philosophical. Such events may well come to pass, he admits: “In the meantime, let's go to the cinema.” Who today could put it better? ☺

Read



Shohini Chaudhuri

CINEMA OF THE DARK SIDE

Atrocity and the Ethics of Film Spectatorship

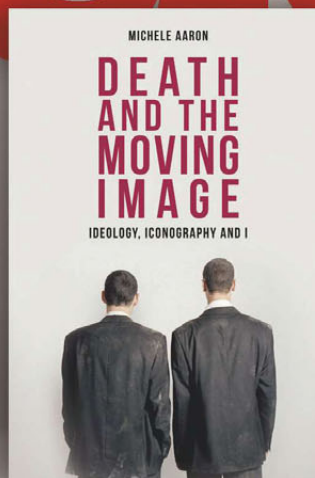
By Shohini Chaudhuri, Edinburgh University Press, paperback, illustrated, 208 pp, £19.99 ISBN 9781474400428 *Cinema of the Dark Side* explores how contemporary cinema has treated state-sponsored atrocity in the years since 9/11, evoking multiple manifestations of state terror including torture, genocide, enforced disappearance, deportation and apartheid. It argues that films can disrupt common perceptions of atrocity and build different ones, and proposes a new conceptualisation of human rights cinema. Covering a diverse spectrum of 21st-century cinema, Shohini Chaudhuri deals with documentary and fictional representations of atrocity including, *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012), *Standard Operating Procedure* (2008), *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *Nostalgia for the Light* (2010), *Chronicle of an Escape* (2006), *Children of Men* (2006), *District 9* (2009), *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) and *Paradise Now* (2005). www.euppublishing.com



GOthic

The Dark Heart of Film

Edited by James Bell, BFI, paperback, illustrated, 160pp, £15, ISBN 9781844576821 Through a range of lavishly illustrated essays, by some of the world's foremost authorities in the field, *Gothic: The Dark Heart of Film* reveals how the archetypes of Gothic horror and romance have endured, reflecting our deepest fears back at us. It charts the story of how the Gothic found its dark heart in Britain, and came to life on film across the world, from the silent era, through the Universal horrors of the 1930s, the rise of Hammer in the 1950s, and many other twilight stops on its path to the present. With contributions from Mark Gatiss, Sir Christopher Frayling, Guillermo del Toro, Anne Billson, Jonathan Rigby, Mark Kermode, Roger Luckhurst, Richard T. Kelly, Reece Shearsmith, Matthew Sweet, Ramsey Campbell, Glen Duncan, David Pirie, Marina Warner, Charlie Higson, Roger Clarke, Kim Newman, Victoria Nelson, Helen Oyeyemi and more. <http://tinyurl.com/oqrdydh>



DEATH AND THE MOVING IMAGE

Ideology, Iconography and I

By Michele Aaron, Edinburgh University Press, paperback, illustrated, 272 pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781474402750 *Death and the Moving Image* is the first in-depth study of the representation of death and dying in mainstream Western cinema from its earliest to its latest renditions. It explores the impact of gender, race, nation and narration on death's dramatics on screen and isolates how mainstream cinema works to bestow value upon certain lives. Dedicated to the popular, political and ethical implications of mass culture's themes and imperatives, this book takes mainstream cinema to task for its mortal economies: for its adoration and absolution of some characters and the expendability of others. It also disinters the capacity for film and film criticism to engage with life and vulnerability differently. This book charts important new territory and argues for the centrality of death, trauma and ethics to the sociopolitical significance of cinema. www.euppublishing.com



Helen Piper

THE TV DETECTIVE

Voices of Dissent in Contemporary Television

By Helen Piper, I.B. Tauris, Popular Television Genres series, 256pp, Hardback ISBN 9781780762944, £58, Paperback ISBN 9781780762951 £17.99 What makes British television crime drama so perennially popular? What are the attractions and pleasures of these shows? How are detectives positioned in relation to viewers' national and collective experiences of the 'everyday'? This book addresses these questions, examining the trends evident in a range of series – including *A Touch of Frost*, *Lewis*, *Cracker*, *Life on Mars* and *Luther* – in the context of their broader social meaning. Helen Piper develops a compelling argument about the cultural relevance of some of the more popular and powerful television detectives, claiming that theirs is a privileged role as the licensed 'voices' of dissent. The discontented TV detective, she suggests, may serve to express a broader sense of cultural malaise. www.ibtaurisc.com



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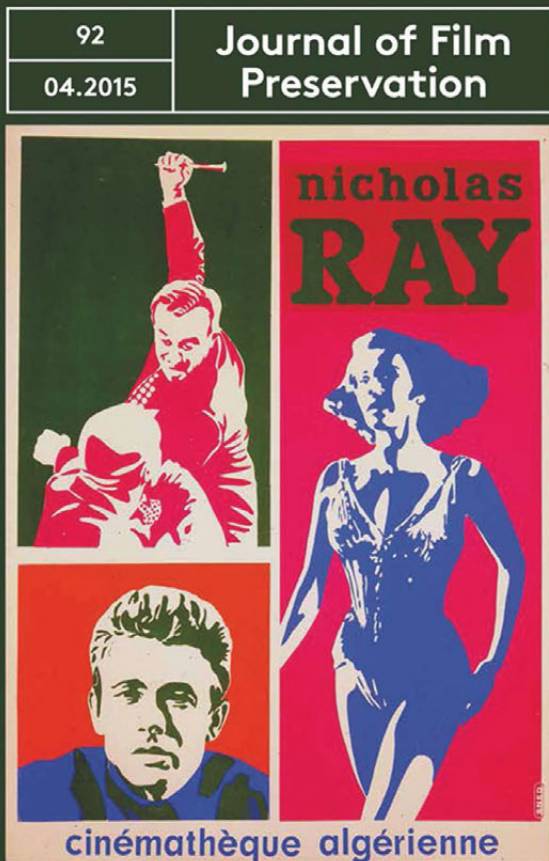
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www.llc.ed.ac.uk/film-studies



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READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

WENDERS BOAT COMES IN

I'm sure you've been inundated with letters championing director's cuts absent from your list ('Remake/remodel', S&S, April), but wanted to recommend one of the most dramatically different director's cuts: Wim Wenders's 280-minute *Until the End of the World* (148 minutes in its initial release), which transforms a muddled, disappointing film into one of Wenders's finest.

Matt Thorne by email

CUTTING LOSSES

Your 'Remake/remodel' article, posing the idea of film as a continual creation, was the tip of a fascinating iceberg that deserves more exploration. Although some recuts provide *auteurs* satisfaction, others seem fated to end in tragedy. Richard Williams's infamous 30-year struggle to finish *The Thief and the Cobbler* ended with Miramax ruining what little was left of a flawed but magnificent project. I recall working with Kenneth Williams when he had recorded its vocal track with Eartha Kitt, now presumably lost. With streaming relegating DVDs to objects of desire for what Matthew Sweet calls "bakelite-sniffing nostalgists", what chance will there be of seeing such alternative versions?

Christopher Fowler London

ADJUSTMENT BUREAU

In 'The Numbers' (S&S, April), current box-office earnings are championed over historic earnings to show, in this case, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (with £25.2 million) apparently trouncing *Basic Instinct* (with £15.5 million) as the UK's erotic genre champion. But with adjustment for inflation *Basic Instinct* earned £24.7 million, leaving it only marginally behind *Fifty Shades*. I understand why producers, promoting their wares, use earnings in this way, but it would be nice if S&S could either adjust for inflation or, better still, show the number of tickets sold. Then we would see who the real box-office champions are.

David Simpson Southend-on-Sea

GREY'S ANATHEMA

I found Picturehouse chief booker Clare Binns's 'excuse' for the near-blanket coverage of *Fifty Shades of Grey* in her cinemas not just sad but disingenuous (The Numbers, S&S, April). I can't help thinking that the "independent spirit" she talks of has been subsumed by crass commercial interests. Thankfully, there are a few mavericks like Mark Cosgrove at the Bristol Watershed still around.

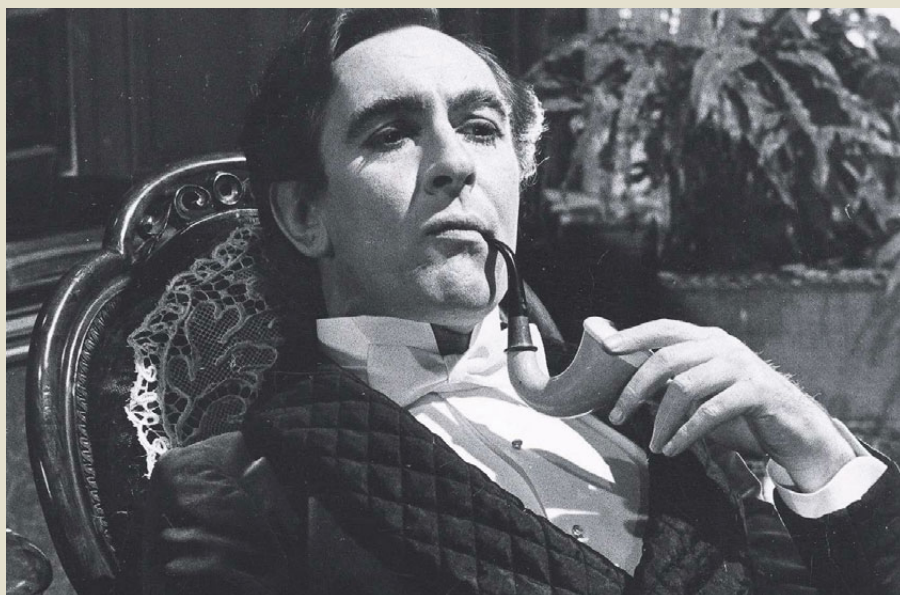
Keith Messenger by email

MAN OF STEEL

I was disappointed by Nick Pinkerton's casual dismissal of director Steve Carver as "perhaps the least talented of Roger Corman's discoveries" (Drum review, Home Cinema, S&S, April). Clearly he's never seen *Steel* (1979) – *The Magnificent Seven* relocated to a union-intimidated big-city building site – which remains a prince among B movies.

Quentin Falk Little Marlow

LETTER OF THE MONTH LONGER AND WILDER



One obvious omission from 'Remake/remodel: director's cuts & alternative versions' (S&S, April) was William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973). The 2000 rerelease features the possessed Regan's 'spider walk' and an extended ending in which the surviving priest Father Dyer and Lee J. Cobb's detective Lt Kinderman get matey – an echo of Kinderman making friends with Father Karras earlier in the story. The result is arguably a smoother, more feelgood coda to the movie than the version we'd known since the early 1970s, though I always considered the original final, fairly abrupt post-possession scene optimistic.

The most frustrating thing is when alternative versions some of us would really like to see tantalisingly fail to materialise. Billy Wilder's enjoyable *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970, starring Robert Stephens,

above) is missing something like an hour's worth of material; the film has stills which we can pore over, such as one with David Kossoff as Mr Plimsoll, the blind caretaker in the lost 'Curious Case of the Upside-Down Room' segment. And a missing flashback to Holmes's Oxford days, and his let-down in romance by Jenny Hanley's character, might have added some emotional depth.

Some of the missing material from *Private Life* reportedly emerged in the 1990s – "bits and pieces" according to Alan Barnes in his book *Sherlock Holmes on Screen*. With the recent surge of Sherlock Holmes productions on TV, and in the cinema with Robert Downey Jr, surely the time is right for a release of a cleaned-up print of *Private Life* with as many extras as possible, including the "bits and pieces".

Chris Gibbings Howden, East Yorkshire

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE PEREZ

Gilberto Perez's piece on Agnès Varda ('Riding the wave', S&S, April) stands as a fitting memorial to this wonderful, passionate cineaste. Before I discovered Perez I did not believe a writer could personify my own madness for the medium. His passing leaves me bereft, in a way that I thought only happened when great filmmakers died. I hope his other writings can be gathered in a volume to stand alongside *The Material Ghost*.

Roger Crittenden Bucks

THE IMITATION JAMES

Watching the young protagonists of *It Follows* (Review, S&S, March) attempting to escape their pursuers, I felt sure that the spirit of M.R. James was also in the vicinity. Many of his stories have malign followers lurking just off the page, awaiting an opportunity to do their worst. The spectres in two of his tales – 'Oh, Whistle, and

I'll Come to You, My Lad' and 'A Warning to the Curious' – were memorably visualised on BBC television some years ago. Those in *It Follows* are equally memorable. The film also offers a sexual variant of another Jamesian theme, the transfer of a deadly curse from carrier to unsuspecting or unwilling victim – the basis of 'Casting the Runes', filmed as *Night of the Demon* (1957).

Terry Hanstock Nottingham

Additions and corrections

April p.70 *Altman*, Certificate 15, 95m 15s; p.72 *Cinderella*, Certificate U, 113m 9s (including short *Frozen Fever*, approx. 7m); p.82 *Rigor Mortis*, Certificate 18, 102m 40s; p.83 *Robot Overlords*, Certificate 12A, 90m 35s; p.84 *Rurouni Kenshin: The Legend Ends*, Certificate 15, 134m 18s; p.88 *Something Must Break*, Certificate 18, 84m 28s, *The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge out of Water*, USA/Australia 2015, ©Paramount Pictures and Viacom International Inc. With the participation of the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office. With the assistance of the Australian Federal Government, Hawaii production tax credits. Screenplay: Jonathan Aibel, Glenn Berger; Executive Producers: Stephen Hillenburg, Cale Boyter, Nan Morales, Craig Sost, Antonio Banderas plays Burger Beard; p.92 *The Water Diviner*, Certificate 15, 111m 7s; p.94 X+Y, Certificate 12A, 111m 35s

THE KILLING



The painful inevitability of the final moments of Stanley Kubrick's 'The Killing' is what makes them so bleakly compelling

By Kim Morgan

Should we start with the final shot? Or the very nearly final shot? The one with the iconic line? No, let's start with the suitcase. That cheap suitcase Sterling Hayden (as the fantastically named Johnny Clay) purchases at a pawnshop and stuffs with money; stuffs with his new life. That damn cheap suitcase. Why? Why the used suitcase? You've got the dough, take yourself to Sears and splurge on a Samsonite. Oh, but you can't begrudge him that. Because why would Sterling Hayden go to Sears? He's too big, he's too hurried – he'd knock over a few mannequins and chuck some cheap lingerie out of his way to get to the luggage. He'd look suspicious. It'd be a pain in the ass. But then what happens? Well, Stanley Kubrick's third film *The Killing* (1956) is such a classic that most readers know *exactly* what happens as a result of that second-hand suitcase. But we won't go there yet.

Dark humour simmers beneath the surface in *The Killing*, directly alongside the dread. Like many heist movies, we root for the robbers knowing they're not going to make it. It's absurd – like rooting for the frog in the fable when it agrees to carry the scorpion across the river. We foresee the demise, but never mind; we tense up in solidarity with the characters and then sink down with them as their circumstances become ever more painful – painful and, in many ways, darkly funny.

With narration by Art Gilmore that's so dead serious it's actually a bit perverse – a voice of god, *Dragnet*-style attempt to provide order for what will become insanity – *The Killing* showcases the then 27-year-old Kubrick's absolute precision with story, dialogue (thanks to Jim Thompson) and non-linear plotting, and his confidence with actors. It also flaunts some of the most characterful mugs since André De Toth's *Crime Wave* (1953) and Orson Welles's *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947). Watching Hayden you feel like you're being confronted with not just an icon, but some kind of loser Jesus Christ – J.C. as a deep-voiced, lumbering ex-con with too short a tie and a pouty lower lip.

Kubrick takes this Los Angeles racetrack heist story and gives the picture both immediacy and a formality, something that likely came from his young days as a photojournalist at *Look* magazine. The images, from dark to harshly lit, from organic to lifeless, from the documentary-looking interiors to the use of lamps and pools of blackness, are reminiscent of some of his most powerful snaps (watching Kola Kwariani as the chess-playing wrestler Maurice Oboukhoff, one can't help thinking of Kubrick's photographs of the wrestler Gorgeous George in action). It's no wonder that DP Lucien Ballard was reportedly annoyed with the young upstart. But this is Kubrick, and even young Kubrick will prove to be a perfectionist. You

So what's Hayden's famed response to being cornered? It's the resigned, quiet and tough, 'Eh, what's the difference?'

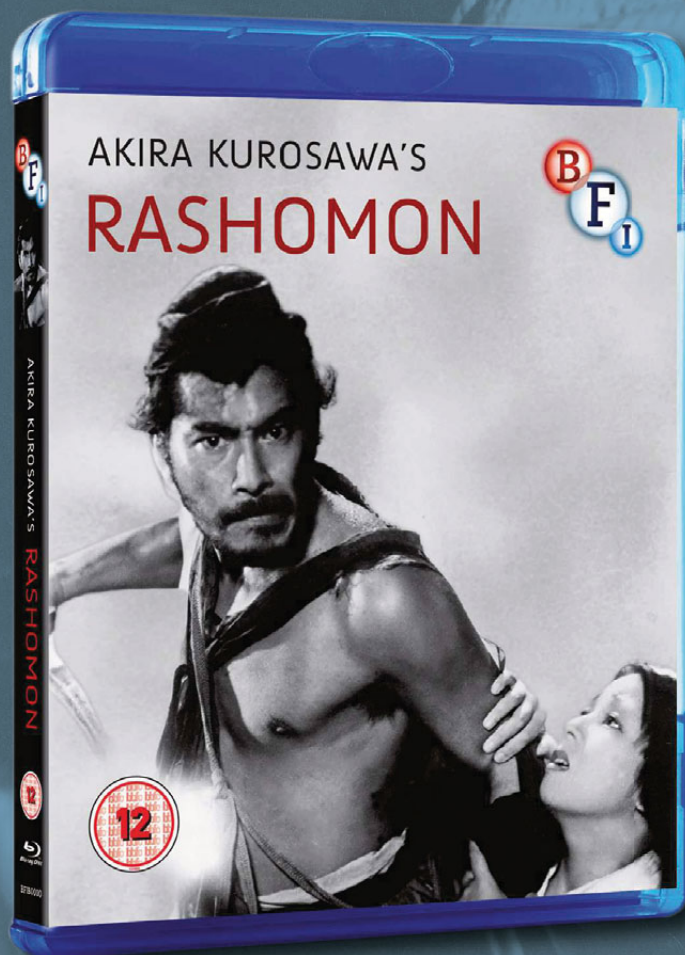
see him priming for *Dr. Strangelove* – pushing faces so far into the frame that at times you feel it could burst wide open. *The Killing* is old-school noir and absolutely modern all at once.

Which leads us back to that suitcase. "Ten minutes later he bought the largest suitcase he could find," intones Gilmore. Exit Johnny Clay with that rickety case, shoving it into his car, which is parked right next to a poster featuring an icon of the old school melding with the modern, an innovator like Kubrick himself – Lenny Bruce on a burlesque bill. Hightailing it to the airport to meet up with his girl Fay (Coleen Gray), Clay's almost there. But... flight 808, the watchful cops, that woman and her wittle poodle who hasn't seen daddy in such a wong, wong time. Checking in the luggage and trusting it to baggage handlers and the driver, with that obnoxious yapping dog as nightmarish as the parrot squawking next to Elisha Cook Jr's dead, bloodied face. When the cheap suitcase falls off the luggage truck on to the tarmac, Hayden watches the money swirling like some noxious green smoke. It's almost beautiful.

Hayden and Gray are still on the go, lamely attempting to hail a taxi outside the airport while the police inch through the double glass doors. So what's Hayden's response to this spectacular ruin? It's the resigned, quiet and tough, "Eh, what's the difference?" That last line is so many things at once – deeply sad, it embraces nihilism but remains weirdly Zen. No one can escape Kubrick's fateful frames, not even someone with the raw physical power of Hayden. He's trapped but his acceptance is so cool, so calm, so perfect, he almost busts through Kubrick's maddening maze. If doom can be motivating, Hayden is downright inspirational. Maybe he is Jesus Christ. ☺



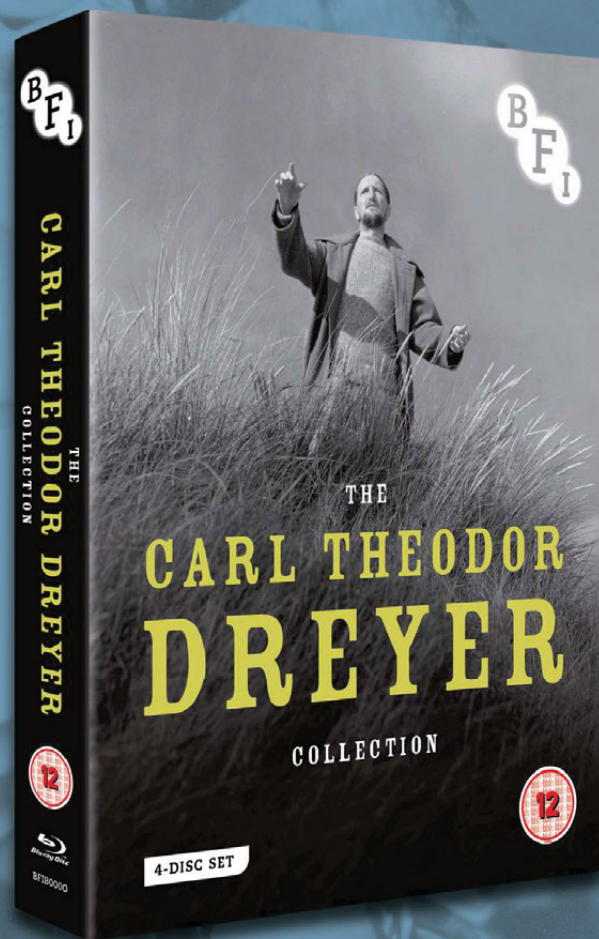
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